

## THE THREEFOLD SOCIAL ORDER

*This article is an extract from the text "Concerning the History of the Anthroposophical Movement" also placed on this website. There are two reasons why I decided to publish it as a separate piece. First, there might be readers with a particular interest in the subject who prefer to see it on its own. Then in the second part of the article I included some personal background details which I felt were needed for the theme, but which were unsuitable in the main text. Finally, the first part of the article was published in the London magazine New View in the Autumn issue of 2014. The editor declined to publish the second part giving the following reasons: "I have no problem with your thoughts as expressed in the article as such, but I feel a great deal more background would need to be placed before the reader to do the subjects you cover justice, especially with regards to Israel." There was nothing I could do about it because he never elaborated what "background" was lacking in my article, and my private readers of it have never complained in this respect. I hope that the readers of this website will find my relevant passages intelligible whatever opinion they might form about them.*

### THE ORIGIN AND ESSENCE OF THE THREEFOLD SOCIAL ORDER

However tragic and overwhelming the events of the First World War, even during those times Rudolf Steiner concerned himself with the future, with what humanity, at least its European part, was going to build on the ruins of the old world order. But of course his concern with the future, though affected by the war, did not originate with it. For him there was no need to create the ruins first and to allow the calamity to happen, in order to realize that 'the good old world' was not that good and was in an urgent need of rebuilding. The writing was already on the wall for everyone who was able and willing to see it. Steiner was one of them. Only a few months before the war broke out he spoke the words the grave reality of which took so much suffering to appreciate: "Someone able to see through social life with the eye of the spirit will see the terrible foundations of social cancers, social ulcers springing up everywhere, and the seer feels deep concern for our civilization."

But seeing social cancers, being concerned about them and expressing this concern was only a starting point for Steiner. The next step was to find a cure and then to administer it. Steiner started looking for a remedy as soon as he discovered the disease which happened long before he spoke the above words. He had been concerned with social, economic and political issues all his life and spoke on the social question within the Anthroposophical (then Theosophical) Movement as early as 1903. In 1905 he wrote an essay entitled *Anthroposophy and the Social Question* which showed not only his deep concern with this question and thorough knowledge of it, but also all signs of a sound answer with which he intended to respond to it. It was in that essay that Steiner formulated what he called "a fundamental social law" which we shall come to later. In subsequent years he continued to work on the remedy for social ills, and during the war this work came to fruition. So when the need for such a remedy was experienced by others as well and Steiner was asked for help and advice, he was ready and responded with comprehensive and far reaching, and at the same time specific and practical, proposals.

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The war was approaching its fourth hapless year. One of Steiner's followers, Count Lerchenfeld, who occupied a high position in the German political establishment, clearly saw the incompetence, impotence and hopelessness of the country's leadership not only in dealing with the current situation, but also regarding any ideas as to what might replace the existing unworkable economical-political system when

the war would eventually come to an end. Desperate and without seeing any answer to the present malaise he turned to Steiner.

The social sphere of life is not some specialized field which can only be fathomed by experts. We all are part of it and it concerns us all. Therefore with regard to its actual functioning everyone should have some understanding, a possibility to form a judgement and the right to have a say. This is what Steiner expected from others when he formulated and made public his social ideas. And this is how he explained their origin and nature: "Nothing I published [regarding social issues] has grown out of theoretic thought work. In the course of more than three decades I have followed up the spiritual, political and economic life of Europe in its most varied branches. The result has, I believe, given me an insight into the tendencies to which this life is pushing, in its road towards a recovery. These thoughts are not the thoughts of one individual, but they express the unconscious volition of European mankind."

But if that was the case why those vital thoughts dwelled unconsciously within the majority of Europeans? Steiner gave the following answer: "The special conditions of modern life [...] did not permit this volition to appear in the full consciousness of a sufficiently great number of people in clear outline and connected with the striving after practical execution. It is the tragedy of the present that innumerable human beings obstruct their own view into what is really necessary by illusions about the things for which they strive. Party conceptions, completely obsolete, spread a mist of thought over what is really necessary. People indulge in unpractical, unaccomplishable tendencies; the actuality they may undertake becomes a barren utopia, whereas they regard, on the other hand, as utopian the proposals which are made from the true practice of life."

One should not be surprised if the reader feels that not much has changed since then in this respect and that the above words could have been said today. But will the reader also feel, upon familiarising himself with Steiner's social ideas, that they are applicable today? In any case the best way to view and examine them is the one, in which they were born – not out of theoretical musing but out of practicalities of life. As a starting point we shall choose the very centre of the body social – the human being and his needs.

It is a simple fact of life that every human being has his needs, which he is striving to satisfy. As a societal being he can do it only within the society in which he lives and by the means and facilities provided by it. Though in actual life situations the individual interacts not with the society at large but with other individuals and organisations, ultimately it is the state of the society that determines the wellbeing of the individual, i.e. the satisfaction of his needs. To see specifically how this determination works, we have to examine more closely both the needs themselves and the body social from which their satisfaction comes.

All numerous and diverse individual human needs fall, by their very nature, into three distinct categories. One embraces human material needs – to sustain our physical existence, as well as our activities and interests. Another category of needs distinguishes us as human beings and individuals; these are our spiritual needs – cultural, educational, religious, etc. The third type is determined by the fact that we live in a community with our fellow human beings; hence our needs for some rules and regulations to safeguard our healthy communal relationships with one another.

Now the satisfaction of these three categories of needs comes, respectively, from three different sources, which constitute three distinct spheres of the body social – the economic sphere (the production, distribution and consumption of commodities), the cultural sphere (education, science, art, religion, etc.) and the legal-judicial sphere (the province of legislature, government and politics). As it happens, in the course of life we neither note nor even notice this distinction either in our needs or in the body social. But we have to if we wish to understand what is wrong with our society and to

put it right. Because, as there is a fundamental difference between the three categories of our needs, there is a similar difference in the ways they should be satisfied and in the principles, on which the three spheres of the society should be based and function.

The products that satisfy our material needs, be they goods or food, come from nature. But the nature products, before they become commodities suitable for consumption, undergo a process of transformation known as a production process. A modern production process is characterised by a division of labour where each participant fulfils only some functions and represents only a part of what constitutes a coherent whole. Without individual contributions the whole will not work. Thus the whole depends on every part, however small, while separate parts are useless by themselves. This creates interdependence of all participants of the production process in their collective work towards a common objective.

But the production process is, in its turn, only a part of the whole economic sphere of the society. The main feature of this sphere is that nobody produces anything for himself but uses the products produced by others. The recognition of this not only as a fact but also as a necessity allowed Steiner to formulate the aforementioned fundamental social law which goes as follows: "*The well being of a community of people working together will be the greater, the less the individual claims for himself the proceeds of his work, i.e. the more of these proceeds he makes over to his fellow workers, the more his own needs are satisfied, not out of his own work but out of work done by others.*" This again signifies an interdependence of those involved in the economic process at large. Since everyone is involved in it – some as producers and sellers of goods and all as consumers – this interdependence is total and even global nowadays. If this fact of life is recognised and appreciated in all its significance and consequences, then it will inevitably lead to the realisation that the guiding principle and practice of the economic sphere and life should be *cooperation* – of all its participants, at all levels and in all situations. To use a more elevated but no less appropriate term for this principle, it can be called *fraternity*.\*

If in the sphere where we satisfy our material needs interdependence is the main factor, with the spiritual needs the opposite is true. Our individual spiritual needs do not, and should not, depend on other people and their spiritual needs. As we all are intrinsically different as individuals, so are our spiritual needs which spring from the unique individuality of each of us. Our individual spirit is free and so should be its needs and aspirations – nobody should determine them for us. Whatever practical difficulties might arise in satisfying them (exactly as with the material needs), the guiding principle in the spiritual-cultural sphere should be *freedom, liberty*.

Again the situation is completely different with our needs pertaining to our relations with our fellow citizens. Here everyone should have the same rights, the same opportunities and the same civil obligations irrespective of the multitude of individual differences, interests and needs. In a word, all should be equal before the law and the same law should apply to everyone. Thus the guiding principal in the legal-judicial sphere should be *equality*.

Liberty, equality and fraternity (*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*) – this tripartite motto of the French Revolution reflected, and has been reflecting ever since, people's aspirations and ideals. A lot has been done in the attempts to realise them, but their meaningful implementation can hardly be achieved when people have different views

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\* Economy as such, with its various aspects, was an object of special studies by Steiner and a subject of his lectures and articles. In 1922, on a request from students of Economics, he held the National-Economic course of fourteen lectures and seminars where he dealt with such issues as money and capital, value and price, wages and interest, production and trade, land and labour and others. The course was translated into English as *World Economy* with the subtitle *The Formation of a Science of World-Economics*.

and are even confused about their exact meaning, applicability and compatibility. This is due to the lack of clarity regarding the nature of human needs and their satisfaction. Steiner brought this clarity about. Thus, *fraternity* should have no political, social or sentimental connotations. It simply denotes an attitude and mode of conduct of people doing something together where the common goal and interdependence are the innate factors. This applies equally to a single enterprise, to a branch of industry, to producer-consumer interactions, and to the whole economic sphere. *Liberty* does not mean freedom to do whatever one likes regardless, but only freedom to express one's views and ideas and to pursue and develop one's spiritual interests and aptitudes, both spiritual and physical. *Equality* applies not to human beings themselves, but to what takes place between them, i.e. to their relationships. As to the society at large, Steiner explained that for it to be healthy, not only each sphere is to function properly, according to its intrinsic principle, but also all three should be autonomous and independent from one another and yet form a harmonious whole.

As it happened, at the very time of Count Lerchenfeld's appeal, Steiner successfully concluded his research of thirty years in another very important sphere of human existence. Though its connection with the social sphere seems most improbable, the analogy between the two might prove very useful for the understanding of the latter.

The other sphere of research was the human organism, its extraordinary complexity and the mystery of its harmonious functioning. Steiner discovered that the latter was due to the fact that all numerous parts, different substances and various processes which constitute the human organism are ordered in a particular way which is most functional, efficient and propitious. All these components are arranged in three distinct systems. One is the nerve system including sense organs and head (brain); another is the rhythmic system which comprises the organs of blood circulation and breathing; and the third is the metabolic system consisting of the limbs and the digestive system.

Each of these systems functions according to its own inherent principles unsuitable for the other two. And, being autonomous in themselves, these systems depend upon, penetrate and support one another, thus constituting a healthy and harmonious whole, the human organism. It becomes ill not only when one of the systems malfunctions, but also when the harmonious relationship between the systems breaks down, and the working principles and processes of one system illegitimately invade another.

Like the human organism, the social organism consists of three intrinsically different systems, which should at once be independent and support one another, be autonomous and yet form a harmonious whole. Likewise, they work together not only within the organism as a whole, but in every part of it. Also, the social ills, like human ones, happen when within the systems their inherent principles are violated, as well as when one system or another, instead of supporting the others, imposes itself on them.

So for the social organism to be healthy its three spheres should support, fructify and safeguard one another. The forms of their fruitful cooperation and contributions may be outlined as follows: The economic sphere 'feeds' the body social sustaining it materially and financially. The spiritual sphere is its 'brain', the source of ideas, values, mores and morality. The legal sphere, the state, is its 'guardian'; it makes sure that the society as a whole, its institutions and citizens live and function orderly, without being disadvantaged or themselves causing harm to others.

That is, in a nutshell and in my own rendering, the essence of Steiner's response to the desperate appeal of Count Lerchenfeld for help. Upon familiarising himself with Steiner's ideas, his mood changed completely. Now he saw the light at the end of the tunnel. In fact he became so enthusiastic about these ideas that the proverbial tunnel turned for him into a road with a clear direction. Though it was

bumpy and uphill, nevertheless it led to a definite destination which seemed realistic and within reach. Count Lerchenfeld further asked Steiner to set forth his ideas in a memorandum which he and his like-minded friends would circulate among influential political figures and present to some of them personally for discussions and elucidations. Steiner preferred, however, before presenting his ideas to the country's leadership as some plan of action, to have them first examined and discussed by all strata of society. But in the circumstances he had to follow whatever path was available. In any case, he did not share his associate's fervent optimism.

It was not scepticism on his part but realism. As has been stated before, Steiner's main purpose in life was to renew the culture and society in all their aspects. As soon as there was a real opportunity for a renewal he would immediately use it. Sometimes the nature of a renewal was such that it would require only his own efforts, like, for instance, his spiritual research. In other instances, notably in the realm of art, it required participation of other people as well. While in the case of social renewal the whole society and millions of its citizens would have eventually to be involved. The changes in the society and in people's attitude and thinking would have to be fundamental. Such things do not happen overnight. So being convinced that his social ideas were both realistic and necessary Steiner was also realistic about their implementation. But this did not mean that no attempts or even first steps should be made when and if an opportunity presented itself. Count Lerchenfeld's appeal was exactly such an occasion, and Steiner's proposal, depending on the response it was to receive, was an attempt or the first step to realise his ideas.

In the circumstances it turned out to be an attempt rather than a tangible beginning. The various individuals in leading positions who were approached with the new ideas were too preoccupied with the war and too overworked and tired to concern themselves with something as serious and fundamental as that. And even when some of them went into the matter somewhat deeper, they could at best grasp and appreciate one idea or other and not the whole concept of the threefold membering of the society with all its consequences. Besides, their will at the time was paralysed to the extent that it made it impossible for them to undertake new initiatives or anything going beyond their immediate daily tasks. Also there was fear in some of them of something which was so fundamentally new and at odds with their customary way of thinking. So the attempt to introduce the threefold social ideas from above – not the best but the only way possible at the time – failed.

But it did not deter the enthusiastic protagonists of these ideas, whose number rapidly grew among both anthroposophists and non-anthroposophists, from making another attempt after the war ended. This time the situation was different. The devastating consequences of the war and a need for a new direction in the life of the society at large became apparent to many. Steiner again played a pivotal role in this new attempt. In the first instance he wrote two important papers which launched, this time, a social movement – the Threefold Social Order. The first was the appeal *To the German People and the Civilised World*. Steiner's analysis of the current calamitous situation and the reasons that led to it, and the remedy he suggested, can be summarised by the following quote: "The forces of the times are pressing for knowledge of a social structure for mankind which is completely different from what is commonly envisaged. Social communities hitherto have, for the most part, been formed by human instincts. To penetrate their forces with full consciousness is a mission of the times." He outlined the social structure required by the times and concluded: "Either people will accommodate their thinking to the requirements of reality, or they have learned nothing from the calamity and will cause innumerable new ones to occur in the future."

These were prophetic words, but very few realised it at the time. Nevertheless the appeal was signed by many prominent personalities from Germany, Austria and

Switzerland, many of whom were not anthroposophists, and was distributed in a number of European countries. Soon after that Steiner's fundamental book on the social question, *Basic Issues of the Social Question*, was published (translated into English as *The Threefold Commonwealth* and later as *Towards Social Renewal*). Here are rendered some of its main points.

The social question is not something which has suddenly emerged in our time and which can be conclusively resolved by some enlightened individuals or by an act of parliament. The social question is an integral part of modern life and society and as an ever changing and developing phenomenon it cannot be resolved once and for all. Just as a living organism passes from the state of satiation to inevitable hunger, the social organism has a tendency of passing from the state of order to disorder, while social institutions are predisposed to producing anti-social tendencies. As there is no food that permanently stills hunger; there can be no universal social panacea. Thus the social question and anti-social tendencies have to be addressed and resolved anew each time as they inevitably arise at particular junctures in the development of the society and its institutions.

Therefore this book does not offer any hard and fast theory or a quick and final solution. Rather it intends to show a direction towards what is needed in the social sphere at present and in the near future. It wishes to stimulate people in their collective efforts to bring about what is socially desirable and what reflects the realities and necessities of our time. Having introduced to the reader the tripartite structure of the body social Steiner indicated that in the past the workings and integration of the three spheres of society were carried out by social instincts in accord with the human nature as it was at the time. But nowadays the social instincts have to be replaced by conscious social thinking, determined social will and purposeful social actions.

However it is not happening yet. In the interim period in which we now live we witness an inability of the persistent old instincts and habitual way of thinking prevalent in our society to deal with the demands of modern mankind. Most perniciously this inability manifests itself in the current state of spiritual life and of the cultural/spiritual sphere as a whole. Spiritual life provides the spiritual and moral nourishment for the society and is the source of ideas and impulses that guide and advance the human civilization. Its pivotal role puts it at the very centre of the social question, and if the society becomes ill it is due to the impotence of spiritual life.

The contemporary spiritual life is undermined, to begin with, by the fact that its value and significance are neither recognised nor appreciated. It is viewed as something abstract and theoretical, but when it finds a practical application it takes the form of ideology; as such it is used as a political and economic weapon by some and is shunned and mistrusted by others. On the whole, within the body social the attention is diverted from spiritual forces to economic processes which are considered the prime driving force of our life and society. What is more, the spiritual life, and education as its essential part, became increasingly influenced by and even to a large degree dependant upon political and economic forces and institutions.

For the spiritual life and education to be able to fulfil their vital role, also with regard to their current 'oppressors', the recognition of this role has to be restored in the first place. Then they have to be made completely free as far as their content, functioning and administration are concerned. Therefore the essential social task today is to liberate them from any extraneous constraints and external influences of the state and economy. Social tendencies are innate in free spiritual life; once liberated it will, of necessity, develop social understanding while the cooperation of individuals active within it will, through its own essence, acquire a social form. This strong and healthy spiritual life will send propitious and salutary impulses into the political and economic spheres and provide the guidelines for the recovery of the social organism.

Similarly, the economic sphere, despite its domineering position and influence in the life of individual and society, is not healthy in itself. It is due to a number of factors, both external and internal. Externally it is not autonomous as it should be, but is subject to the influence of political forces or even a direct interference by the government. Internally, as it comprises three inseparable and yet different areas of activities – production, distribution and consumption of commodities, their relations are far from being harmonious and cooperative. Rather than being guided by true economic and social considerations, they, as well as such vital factors as wages and prices, are determined by self-interest and by obscure and unpredictable market forces. Also the unrestrained economic forces of the modern economic process tend to subjugate everything within their reach to their voracious power turning, with the dire consequences, land, labour and human rights into commodities.

So the political state and economy should be completely separated from each other – for the benefit of both. If the economic interests are carried over into the legislation then the latter inevitably becomes the expression of the former rather than of what is innate in it as an awareness of human rights. Equally, if the political state assumes economic functions it loses its ability to safeguard these rights in the economic sphere and to legislate properly the economic activities. To say nothing about the damage done to the economic process by the interference of those who are not an organic part of it. The relationship between the economic and legal spheres should be similar to that between sovereign states. Each should develop according to its own nature and principles enabling their beneficial cooperation and mutual support.

However the liberation of human labour power from its commodity character and status is the most important task. While labour remains part of the economic process this cannot be done – it is in the nature of this process to turn everything within it into commodity. So labour should be liberated not *within* the economic process but *from* it. As labour power is an integral part of the human being and not of the economic process, it should be extracted from the economic sphere and its jurisdiction and placed where it belongs – in the realm of social forces, human rights and equality which will cleanse it of its commodity character.

What the economic life itself requires is associative work of those involved in it as producers, distributors and consumers. They together should form associations where their different interests, concerns, insights, experience and expertise will be represented. Their cooperative work would comprise such important tasks as the regulation of the production and circulation of goods and of their prices. The size, the working and the number of associations in any particular area would be determined by those concerned in accord with the local conditions. A network of such associations, whose interrelations would be prompted and determined by practical necessities, would underlie the economic life as a whole and organise it from within.

The last chapter of the book is called 'International Relations between Social Organisms'. Steiner envisaged that when social organisms of individual countries formed themselves on the threefold principle their relations would also be threefold, i.e. they would be between the identical spheres and institutions of those countries. These three types of relations – spiritual, economic and legal – would be, as the spheres themselves, independent from one another.

The international relations and cooperation within each sphere of activity would emerge naturally and derive from the reality which is experienced by mankind as a whole at the present stage of its development. This reality, notwithstanding the national and regional particularities and differences, comprises the common spiritual life, the world economy and the shared perception of the essence of human rights (in our day the latter is even inscribed in the United Nations document *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*).

This type of relationship between the nations – between institutions and individuals with shared understanding of fundamental principles and values of their spheres of activity – would replace national, political and economic conflicts. In case of conflicts it would be much easier to address them with a conciliatory understanding and appreciation of the common good and of the value and dignity of each component comprising mankind. Perhaps the most important consequence of this cooperative work for the international relations can be seen in the following observation by Steiner: "The resulting complex of mutual interest among the individual social organisms will make national frontiers seem inconsequential for human coexistence."

Over eighty thousand copies of the book were sold in the first year and it had several editions. The book was followed by many articles, lectures (over a hundred), talks and discussions. Steiner met with leading politicians and industrialists, with various groups and individuals, with workers' councils and ordinary workers, addressing at times thousands of them. The discussions often presented a tough challenge to Steiner, be it the inhospitable environment like smoke-filled taverns, or aggressive questions, or even hostile confrontations. Also he was besieged by endless invitations to speak on the subject and appeals for help and advice. Though none of it was new to him, nevertheless, bearing in mind his other wide-ranging and very intensive activities, the new ones placed a tremendous burden on his time and life forces (and his voice!).

But this time he had many enthusiastic and committed supporters and collaborators, anthroposophists and non-anthroposophists, both ordinary and prominent members of society. Special organisations under the title "The Union for the Threefold Social Order" were launched in Germany and Switzerland, as well as weekly and monthly periodicals, with the expressed purpose of establishing such an order. There were many other purposeful actions and activities, both collective and individual.

Alas, all those sincere, earnest and resolute efforts did not achieve the desired results, and the Threefold Social Order had not been established in any shape or form anywhere in Europe. The obvious question arises: Why? Inevitably one reason for the failure was, despite enthusiasm and dedication of many, the notorious 'human factor', i.e. 'human imperfection'; in this case it was incompetence, lack of knowledge and understanding, personal and group interests, selfishness, mistrust, rivalry or even an outright hostility.

But in an historical discourse one should consider not only human but historical factors as well. And this brings us to another obvious question, of an historical nature: Were the proposed changes really needed and possible? Steiner, with his insight into contemporary events and evolutionary forces, answered it with the most emphatic "Yes!" which was why he introduced the threefold social ideas in the first place. Some of his contemporaries, lacking his insight but not the concern for the state of affairs, echoed his answer. But the majority, judging by the end results, responded to the proposed changes with the equally unequivocal "No!", whether it was voiced explicitly, or was implicit in a lack of understanding or in mere apathy. So what was it that manifested itself through those events – wishful thinking or a missed opportunity?

It is not an idle question for the simple reason that it is as relevant for our time as it was ninety years ago. In many respects we live today in a completely different world but the human being with his vital needs, and the society with its inadequate means to meet them, and the consequent problems are still the same. More specifically, the basic structure and functioning of the body social, with which Steiner's ideas were concerned, have not changed, and the social question remains unsolved. Though the Europe of the WWI and its aftermath was in a particularly critical situation, it was only the beginning of the modern time's calamities and crises which since then have plagued Europe and the world. The present affluence of the Western society

might have eased or obscured some deep-rooted social abnormalities and ills but it has neither rectified nor cured them. And most certainly it has not precluded new ones. But when nowadays any of the social problems, old or new, is recognised and addressed the proposed solution is almost invariably of a make-shift nature. Hence the above question. One does not have to be a historian or sociologist to try and answer it. One only needs to be concerned with current social issues and ask oneself whether the society in which one lives is in need of a fundamental overhaul along the lines proposed by Steiner. A mere contemplation of this question may help the reader to understand what happened, or is happening for that matter, to Steiner's social ideas historically. In any case the fact remains, that in the emaciated post WWI Europe an historical endeavour was made to solve the social problems of modern humanity in a fundamental and healthy way.

## TWO CHALLENGES TO THE IDEAS OF THREEFOLD SOCIAL ORDER

When something fundamentally new appears in the public arena, like Steiner's social ideas, it inevitably encounters resistance and even hostility. We spoke about it earlier. But now we shall speak of two phenomena that challenge Steiner's social ideas quite differently, though each in its own way. One challenge took place in Steiner's time and was also in the sphere of ideas which proposed serious changes. As its ideas were political we shall call it a political challenge. The other did not exist at the time; it is a modern phenomenon which challenges the threefold social ideas in the practical sphere, but its challenge is quite different from what Steiner and his supporters experienced at the time or from what any other modern phenomenon might suggest. As it emerged historically we shall call it an historical challenge.

### A Political Challenge – Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points

When Rudolf Steiner and his supporters were trying to implement his threefold social ideas a virtually parallel public endeavour, with equally far-reaching implications, took place. It was the peace proposals for the post-war Europe by the US President Woodrow Wilson known as the Fourteen Points. Obviously Wilson's proposals received much more attention and publicity than Steiner's, but it was not the only difference between the two. Despite Wilson's personal humanitarian and idealistic motives his proposals did not address the wider social issues but only the problems caused by the war. But even then he sought only political solutions which alone can never solve the deep-seated problems of social and human nature.

However, Steiner's main objections to those proposals, which he voiced on many occasions over the years, concerned their substance rather than scope. Not being based on a proper understanding of the true reality they led the European nations, and the world, into a wrong direction (while Wilson himself was led, or better to say – *misled*, by backward spiritual beings, as was revealed by Steiner's spiritual research). Wilson advocated self-determination, autonomy and freedom for individual nations which seemed at the time, and still seems to many today, an honourable objective, a prerequisite for a national wellbeing and a right and sound basis for international relations.

However, to apply the concept of freedom to nations is wrong. Freedom, as a universal principle and the main component of the social triune, can only have a spiritual meaning. As such it is applicable only to individual human beings, to the spirit within them. If applied in a political sense, especially collectively, it inevitably leads to sectarianism, separation and enmity. Applied to nations it encourages nationalism and chauvinism, dividing nations and setting them apart and against one another – a sure recipe for ever new calamities and disasters. From the spiritual viewpoint the notion of

national freedom is not based on reality but *individual freedom* is, and it should be pursued as a human and social ideal and objective. When it is truly attained then *free individuals* will find a right form both for their national secure existence and for proper inter-nations relations.

Alas, only a few can see the truth of it even today despite all the evidence readily supplied by our troubled time. Even if people are alarmed by the rising nationalism with its insidious problems, they do not see its real causes let alone remedies for them. As to the notion of national autonomy, independence, self-determination and sovereignty, for most people it is synonymous with that of *freedom*. It is for them a historically evolved necessity, a worldwide reality and a valid international principle. Furthermore, they can confidently affirm that at least for some modern national conflicts characterized by hostility, discrimination and even violence, to apply and safeguard this principle is the quickest and most effective way of putting an end to xenophobic injustice, humiliation and persecution. While Steiner's ideas, even given their spiritual and social validity, can only offer a hope of a faraway solution. Too faraway for many victims of national animosity to benefit from it.

One has to admit the strength of these arguments born out by a number of real events. Urgent and extreme situations require urgent and effective measures, especially if it concerns human life. No doubt that prevention is preferable to treatment and treatment to surgery. But where would we have been today without the latter? So separation and autonomy are the forms of social surgery.

Accepting this, the following considerations, though, should be taken into account when attempts are made at solving national conflicts. As such measures can evidently bring some people certain tangible benefits, they are achieved, as a rule, at the expense of others, whether this expense is of a material, cultural or psychological nature. In other words, some wounds are healed – new ones are inflicted.

Then, a national, ethnic and racial distinction is only one source of conflicts between people living together. There are many other sources which take prominence from time to time – religious, ideological, social, cultural, territorial or even sexual. If we wish to be consistent and resort to the 'separation and autonomy' principle for solving such conflicts as well, then we shall end up with a society which would be unable to function and in which it would be impossible to live.

Further, urgent and effective 'surgical' measures, as necessary as they are in some circumstances, are far from always being lasting, secure or even right solutions. Therefore after applying them, long-term and *right* solution should be sought. To give a rather crude example, if one is marooned on a desert island and is dying of thirst, it is only natural that to quench it he would resort to drinking sea water. It might sustain him for a while, but to survive he would have to find fresh water. Rudolf Steiner proposed his social ideas as a reliable source of fresh water for human society in our time.

### An Historical Challenge – the Jewish People and the State of Israel

As it happens, the author of this article is biographically connected with two themes which feature and converge in the second challenge. This connection goes far beyond some academic interest. It is much deeper and more substantive, to the extent that it even determined some of the author's vital decisions and actions. As it also influenced the present piece the author decided to preface it with the following personal passage written in the first person and in italics to separate it from the main text.

*The first theme is what is called, in the widest sense, and has been discussed as such in this narrative, a social question. Though, as a Soviet citizen, I was taught and indoctrinated from early childhood to believe that I lived in an ideal society, life taught*

me otherwise. As I grew up and matured, I experienced an ever increasing number of 'imperfections' which I finally identified as social, spiritual and economic ills. Also I began to think about their causes and the ways to eliminate them which started my life-long interest in social problems, in the social question as such. There was no possibility of openly discussing these things, let alone doing something about them. But nobody could stop me from thinking and having my own ideas.

Then, some eight years prior to my emigration from the Soviet Union, I met, and fully embraced, anthroposophy. It came to me in the form of a few basic books, but it was enough to inspire and prompt my thinking in a practical direction. It meant, in the first instance, trying to understand various aspects of life through anthroposophy. And I tried, with the help of anthroposophy, to comprehend those social ills around me and to find a way to remedy them. At that time I had no idea, not only of the Threefold Social Order, but even of the fact that Steiner worked with social issues and developed social ideas. But I had 'social ideas' of my own. Though now I can call them such only in inverted commas, I think they helped me later on, in England, to experience my encounter with Steiner's social ideas more as recognition than as a discovery. It was also recognition of their truth and reality. Emotionally I felt jubilant about them. But emotions aside, on the basis of them and using my own experience, I developed some practical ideas in the sphere of industry, my working environment in the Soviet Union, to be presented both to anthroposophists and non-anthroposophists. However, the threefolding of human society remained for me the most urgent social need.

Concerning the second theme, 'the Jewish question', as a Jew in the Soviet Union you could not escape it – it would not let you. I was deeply concerned with it, with anti-Semitism and particularly with the destiny of the Jewish people. And again, in due course, I tried to comprehend these issues with the help of anthroposophy. At the time I knew nothing of the very special evolutionary mission of the Jewish people as revealed by Steiner – to provide the physical body for Christ. In any case, I was more concerned with what was happening 'here and now'. Here and now was the State of Israel which became for me the focal point of the Jewish destiny. Not for me alone of course, but I could not be satisfied with the two prevailing notions about it shared at the time by many people, both Jews and non-Jews. One was spiritual according to which the State of Israel is the fulfilment of the destiny of the Jewish people. I could understand its premise but it did not shed any light on the present and future destiny of the Jewish people and its meaning. The other notion, of the State of Israel being a shelter for the Jewish people, was, unlike the first one, of a physical nature. Its justification was only too obvious, but was it all that there was to it? I thought that there should be a deeper, spiritual meaning in the fact of its emergence in the world arena. There must be a mission in it – and not exclusively Jewish, but of a universally human nature.

Therefore when the Six-Day War brought about a revolution in the hearts and minds of the Soviet Jewry my own emotions were mixed. I expressed them, and my thoughts, in the article *From Russia to Israel: a Personal Case-History* written at the request of the London magazine *Soviet Jewish Affairs* and published in May 1972. Here is an extract from it:

"I began to think more and more about Israel and the Jewish people – no longer, as before, with proud satisfaction in them, but with a sense of anxiety for their spiritual future ... today, amidst general joy at unparalleled victories and successes, I am asking myself: victories – yes, but what lies beyond them, what will tomorrow bring for our people, for what purpose are we living today, we who have travelled a two-thousand year road of suffering that very nearly ended in complete annihilation? .. I am not a materialist and naturally could not be satisfied with a list of trophies and growth indices of Israel's gross product. What is more, I considered them to be those

*dangerously enticing factors without which it is impossible to live, but for whose sake alone it is not worth living. I thought that the most crucial period in the history of the Jewish people was now beginning, which would not only decide whether we would be or not be, but also **what** we should be, which essentially means the same thing, and that this was being decided in Israel."*

*When I came to the West, Steiner's revelations about the mission of the Jewish people were to me precisely – revelations, in the deeper meaning of the word. But they made the riddle of the post-Christian Jewish destiny more unfathomable for me. Indeed, why the Jews, after fulfilling their historical evolutionary mission, have not disappeared from the face of the Earth like other nations? Especially as they were helped in that direction by very powerful tools – the Diaspora, the almost universal hatred, persecution, the forced conversion and mixed marriages. Nevertheless, the Jews have been preserved by the Higher Powers, that is, if we believe that they are behind such significant evolutionary processes. Preserved – but why? What for? Is it because some individuals need a Jewish physical body for their current incarnation? Or is it because – but such things are always linked spiritually – the Jewish nation still has a task to fulfil? As someone belonging to this nation, and as an anthroposophist, I wanted to know.*

*On the other hand – and this is again a question to the same Powers – if this nation, evolutionary speaking, is not meant or supposed to exist any longer and its existence is an aberration, what was the purpose of all those persecutions which culminated in the Holocaust, a unique, in its scope and execution, ethnical annihilation in modern times and in a civilised world? What sort of lesson have the Jews been taught or what karmic debt were they repaying especially if they are supposed to be on their way out of the modern world? To what end were all those sufferings inflicted upon them?*

*These questions which I had, and still have, are deep spiritual questions, anthroposophical questions. Surely I could not have been the only one in the entire anthroposophical world, however tiny it is numerically, who asked these or similar questions. As I did not have any answers myself, I was looking for them elsewhere. The obvious address was Rudolf Steiner himself. What he said about the Jews as a spiritual researcher concerned only the distant past. That little of what I got to know of Steiner's observations concerning 'the Jewish question' in our time, was not spiritually based and did not touch upon any of the above questions. But I was more lucky elsewhere.*

*I came across an article where the author, among other things, gives his answer to the question of Jewish suffering, in which he sees "a deep significance", and to the most enigmatic one, that of the preservation of the Jewish people. Here is the relevant quote:*

*"When studying Jewish history of the last 1,500 years one cannot help asking oneself why it is that so despised and persecuted a people manage to persist. Their existence is even a factor considerable enough to disturb the whole world by their problems. A deep secret can be seen in the preservation of this race.*

*We have seen how closely they were connected with the whole life-work of Christ. The mistake, however – the failure to recognise Christ – created a new mission: to remain that surviving part of humankind which was a witness to the crucifixion of the Christ. The destiny which was caused by this non-recognition illumines the reality of those events in Palestine for other nations. ... But that does not mean that only single individuals, who so far have rejected Christ, will be led to Him. The Jewish people, petrified in their tradition, are the only people in the world today who are witness for the Christ from the past. That most of the Jews rejected Him is in this connection of less importance. This fact accounts largely for the singular position occupied by Judaism today. The evidence of the Jewish people for Christ must also*

*be considered when investigating the Jewish problem which at the moment should be of vital interest to all."*

*The article was published as a pamphlet with the title *The Jewish Question and subtitled A Problem of Mankind. The author, prudently, did not offer any solution, but had no doubts about the right approach to finding it: "Clear thinking, sympathetic feelings and ethical action only will help to find the right solution."**

*If some readers find these observations or the pamphlet itself with its courageous title and forthright subtitle, at odds with the present political climate they should not be surprised – it was written in 1944. The author was a prominent anthroposophist and medical doctor Norbert Glas, one of the pioneers of anthroposophical medicine. I found his observations above challenging and thought provoking, but they have not answered my questions concerning the State of Israel which of course did not exist at the time. My own thoughts and observations on the subject constitute the main part of the text to which I return now having completed my personal passage.*

The practicality of Steiner's social ideas has never been put to the test as they have never been realised. No nation has ever even contemplated their implementation. But if we are to contemplate it now and look for a suitable candidate, we can hardly find a nation which is more in need of it and at once more challenging to it than the one of which the great Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyev spoke in the following way: "Passing through the entire history of mankind, from its very beginning and up to our days (which cannot be said about any other nation), the Jewry represents, as it were, the axis of world history."

"Its very beginning" we know from the Bible. Creating the Jewish nation as "his people", giving them the land (which became known as the Land of Israel), endowing them with his guidance and protection and even establishing with them his covenant, God wanted to make his 'chosen people' special and great, a paragon for other nations. Because special was the task intended by God for "his people". Blissfully unaware of this task and finding God's methods of perfecting them rather uncomfortable, the Jewish people resisted and frustrated God's efforts at every opportunity.

One example of disobedience of the young Hebrew nation is of a particular interest to us. They wanted to be "like all the nations" and to have their own king. God was not very pleased that *his people* wished to have not his spiritual reign over them but a secular one. In the end he conceded. As it happened, thanks to this concession in the Jewish history was written one of its glorious pages, with its illustrious personalities and captivating events, which became part of the world cultural heritage. But for the Jewish people it meant that a *political* element entered their life which until then had only *spiritual* guidance and leadership.

The first national statehood lasted for several centuries. Glorious at the beginning the former kingdom of David and Solomon split into two, a big one and a small one, each desperately fighting for its independence. Both lost it. The bigger one was conquered and destroyed first, with its ten tribes taken captive by the occupiers and never heard of since. The smaller one, with its two tribes, was conquered and laid waste by the Babylonian invaders. Its capital Jerusalem with its magnificent Temple built by Solomon was destroyed, and the Jewish state ceased to exist. The population, apart from most poor and unskilled, was taken prisoner and deported to Babylon. It was the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora, a dissipation of the Jews all over the world, which even up to now remains their principal abode.

This forced exile betrayed no signs of what the future had in store for the Jews. In Babylon they were granted religious and professional freedom and allowed to

prosper, thus benefiting their captors. Despite the prosperity, all their years in captivity they were longing for their homeland which was reflected in the famous Psalm:

By the rivers of Babylon,  
There we sat down, yea, we wept,  
When we remembered Zion.

.....

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,  
Let my right hand forget her cunning...

Amazingly, as if their lamentation was heeded, half a century into captivity they were permitted, by their new masters now, to return home together with their possessions and the holy attributes stolen from their destroyed Temple. Only a small part of them returned to the country which for all intents and purposes was no longer theirs, politically and ethnically. But it was theirs spiritually and emotionally.

Those who returned were the first 'Zionists' – and the last for the next two and a half thousand years. And they were the only large group of Jews in the whole history of their Diaspora who returned to their historic and spiritual homeland because they were pulled and not pushed to it. Their objective was to restore and rebuild their spiritual centre rather than their national state. But soon they had to fight for their national and spiritual survival, and in the bloody and prolonged war they finally succeeded. But the hard-won independence and the second national statehood did not last long – less than a century. Then followed two millennia of the Diaspora which culminated in the third, current, attempt at the Jewish independent statehood.

During this long Diaspora the Jews mainly lived, or were forced to live, as communities which eventually became known as *ghettos*. There were times and countries when and where the Jews were treated well, and their communities prospered. But mostly they were ostracised, threatened and persecuted, and lived in extreme poverty. Everywhere they were aliens either by legislation or by the attitude of the indigenous population. Often the only way to survive or succeed was to assimilate and be baptised, and some accepted this option while many were baptized by force. But the majority kept their Jewish identity, faith and tradition. They accepted their Jewish fate as that of suffering till the Messiah would come one day and save them, as was promised to them by their God.

As to their return to their lost homeland, their prayers contained poignant and powerful words expressing both a vow and hope: "Next year in Jerusalem". But for the most it was a tradition, a pledge of faithfulness to their God, a spiritual rather than physical aspiration. If they moved, as a community, from the place of their current abode it was because they had to, but their destination was virtually never that of their prayers. This went on for many generations and for many centuries. But the situation started gradually to change, as the world around them was changing. New enlightened and liberal ideas and social and political changes in the Western World at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century initiated in their wake the process of emancipation of the Jews. Though slow and halting, it did bring some tangible improvements to their situation, and promised more.

But the situation changed again, for the worse this time, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Characteristically, at that time the term 'anti-Semitism' was coined – by someone who advocated it. The new term did not designate a new phenomenon of course, but it did signify a new phase in the old one. Before the animosity towards Jews was of a religious or xenophobic nature and was rooted in base instincts and ignorance. But now, in addition to this, it became an Ideology – a racist Ideology, according to which the Jews belong to a physiologically, intellectually and morally inferior race. Also towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

the Jews were subjected to particularly ugly persecutions and vicious atrocities, notably in Russia.

But now these persecutions and atrocities were widely reported and became part of common knowledge and consciousness. They were detested by many ordinary people and publicly condemned by some distinguished personalities. Most importantly, however, the changes occurred not only around the Jews, but in them as well. Those who were emancipated inwardly more than they were allowed to be outwardly, said enough was enough to their persecutions and persecutors. They not only, for the first time in the history of the Jewish Diaspora, took a firm stand against their offenders, but were determined to find a radical solution to the tragic impasse of the Wandering Jew. And the solution was found: it was to stop wandering and become again "like all the nations" and to have their own home – their own territory, their own country, their own state, their own nationhood, and their own sovereignty.

Though most of those resolute Jews were not religious or traditionalists, they knew that once upon a time the Jews had their own land, state and independence. And the return to this land, which over millennia was under the rule of various occupiers but never a seat of any nation or state and was now virtually barren and sparsely populated, was for them the only solution of 'the Jewish question' worldwide. So the "Next year in Jerusalem" became for those new Zionists, with political, national or spiritual aspirations, a powerful inspiration and a concrete objective.

But the world was not ready yet either to grant the Jews this solution or to offer any other. It took the horrors of the Holocaust for the world to realize the need of the Jews for a national home. The rest, as they say, is history apart from the fact that in this case it is still very much with us and is going to be for the foreseeable future. Thus, since the extraordinary and ever evolving destiny of this "axis of world history" is observable from its very inception to the present day, there is every reason to try and see whether anything can be learnt from it that might be of a universal value applicable to other nations, to the mankind as a whole.

Before making this attempt, however, I wish to mention one particular vision of the destiny and history of the Jewish people. This vision seems to some to be so convincing and even self-evident that it virtually renders all other views on the subject irrelevant. According to it the destiny and history of the Jewish people are unique. This uniqueness is not limited to the fact that Jewish is the only ancient nation which, despite being tiny, scattered and persecuted, survived to the present day. It is the only nation in human history with whom God established his covenant. And the present State of Israel is a miraculous fulfilment of that covenant. Nothing like this has ever happened or can ever happen in human history. But if something is unique and one-off it cannot contain anything universal, i.e. applicable, in this case, to other nations. The only thing that could be universal here is the acknowledgment by other nations of the uniqueness of the Jewish destiny and history.

This vision is of a religious nature. As such it is quite justified and legitimate within its own parameters which by definition cannot include all mankind. Besides, its main premise of the uniqueness of the Jewish nation does not in the least contradict our attempt. For the uniqueness of the Jewish history and destiny does in no way negate the fact that they bear within themselves what is common to all humanity – spiritual, social and national aspects of life, relations and problems. It is for this reason that the history and destiny of the Jewish people are of a special interest to us here.

The national statehood was never a prerequisite and *raison d'être* for their coming in the world arena and for their subsequent existence. According to the Bible, God gave them the land of their abode and their nationhood, but never statehood. Whatever were its merits, when they eventually got it, it did not last very long. In the end, they lost their land as well, and after that, for the next two millennia, it seemed that the main principle of their existence was not *where* to live but *how* to live, or rather

how to *survive*. Only when to follow this principle became impossible for them almost anywhere in the world, a need for a shelter, secure and their own, arose. This need was so urgent that even the location of the shelter was considered by some Jews as unimportant. But the historic, national and spiritual connections were too obvious and powerful to ignore, and they all pointed in one direction – the Land of Israel which once belonged to them. While the past dictated the location of their shelter, the present dictated its form – a national state. Thus, it can be safely asserted that their modern statehood was imposed on the Jewish people.

But can it be equally asserted that all other nations are of a different nature and their own statehood eternally inscribed into their national character and destiny and is a vital need of their individual members? There are no grounds for such assertion whatsoever. Whatever subjective feelings and thoughts of these individuals, the objective and spiritual reality cannot be like this. The fact that the mankind perceives itself today as "a family of nations" – or, to be more precise, as an assemblage of national states – is an historic necessity. But this necessity is temporary by its nature, and its evolutionary significance belongs to the past and not to the future or even to the present. The problem is that in the transient and uncertain present people feel more comfortable living by the habitual past than treading towards the unknown new.

The creation of the modern Jewish state was, by the virtue of its emergence, also an historic necessity.\* But whatever its inevitability this does not change its temporary character. Now the fulfilment of that necessity created a completely new reality. By establishing their national state the Jewish people solved, or partly solved, some of their problems, but at the same time created new ones, both for themselves and for others. Even if some of these problems stem from the specific Jewish destiny or local conditions, they are, in their essence, not specifically Jewish or regional, but common to all mankind. Therefore their solution can only have a universal character and should be based on some universally human principles. The realization of it is the first step towards this solution.

This brings us straight to the Threefold Social Order which postulates such principles and which is an evolutionary necessity for mankind today. No people of whatever country or nation have experienced yet, collectively, the true meaning of freedom, equality and fraternity. Nor are they anywhere near to experiencing it or even to creating prerequisites for such an experience. The Jews, as unwelcome guests of other nations, were direct victims of this state of affairs. For centuries they were at the receiving end of what was wrong in the communal and spiritual life of the societies in which they lived. But now they are, after a very long time, the prime movers of their own affairs and even affect those of others. This double, and unique, experience of the Jewish destiny as a victim-master should allow them to recognise and understand the wrongs of this world. But, most importantly, it gives the Jewish people a unique opportunity to correct, or at least to try to correct, these wrongs – to accomplish something where the others failed.

This "something where the others failed" is the creation of the conditions of life in society for each individual which would allow him to experience fully the reality of

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\* To avoid misunderstanding I wish to clarify in what sense I use the term 'historic necessity' here. He distinguishes between two types of events in human life, both individual and collective: those that are determined by man himself and those determined by spiritual forces standing behind and guiding our evolution. While the necessity and inevitability of the latter is preordained, the former are unpredictable as they are determined by many earthly factors and by human freedom (for the sake of simplicity the ever-present spiritual forces are excluded from this equation). But since they have taken place one can not only see, with hindsight, "that it was good" (or bad, mostly!), but also should regard and treat them as a necessity. For the purpose of clarity, to designate this distinction in this particular context, I would call the division of mankind into different nations and races an evolutionary (spirit-guided) necessity and the formation of national states an historic ('man-made') necessity.

the implemented principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. If as a victim the Jewish people felt more acutely than others the lack of these vital principles, then as a master they should no less intensely feel and recognise the necessity of their implementation. But the internal and external conditions of life in Israel and in the Israeli society are such that one would be hard pressed to find more difficult application for it. This ancient-new nation is trying to come to terms with itself and with its new identity. The various religious, cultural, ethnic and political differences and interests vibrate through the life of the country where big groups of population have values and ways of life incompatible with one another. While nearly one fifth of its citizens do not recognise Israel as their state. To say nothing about a virtually permanent state of war in which the county has existed since its creation. And it is not easy for this nation to find its footing in the world which is still unable to forgive it its own centuries-old injustice towards it.

Yet if the history and destiny of the Jewish people, as well as its present, teach us anything in the sphere of human coexistence and social life, it is exactly this, that the Threefold Social Order is the only way out of the hopeless entanglement in which mankind, and Israel and its people in particular, find themselves today.