Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research
Vol. 7, No. 3–4, 176–193, 2005

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Anthroposophical Curative Education in the Third Reich: The Advantages of an Outsider

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ABSTRACT *Anthroposophical curative education originates from the philosophical and pedagogical ideas of Rudolf Steiner. Born in Germany in 1924, in the heyday of racial hygiene, and with a phase of establishment parallel to the growth of National Socialism, this reform movement for children with special needs faced some crucial challenges. By shedding light on the conditions and strategies of the Steiner institutions under the Third Reich, this article explores some of the reasons why the co-workers in these institutions in several cases avoided collaboration with the Nazi regime and their lethal politics towards disabled children. One assumption is that anthroposophical curative education was in an outsider position in Germany, allowing the professionals involved the benefit of operating outside the direct jurisdiction of the agency of the Third Reich.*

With their 70 years of experience as an alternative pedagogical movement, Steiner Waldorf educational services for people with disabilities are unique in Scandinavia. Curative education, as it is called, arose from the Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner's (1861–1925) anthroposophy launched in Germany and Switzerland in 1924. Before World War II curative education had spread to the majority of Central European countries. The first homes for children with special needs in Scandinavia, based on the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, were started in 1930, in Finland and Iceland. The Scandinavian children's homes all had in common tha t they were established and run by co-workers who had been on long work and study visits to corresponding institutions in Germany and Switzerland.

In Scandinavia the war represented a breach of contact with the European "*Bildungs*" tradition in professions such as education and psychology, and a turn westwards towards a more Anglo-American influence (Stafseng 1996). This, however, was not the case for the anthroposophical pedagogical movement, which represents an unbroken continental (meaning German-speaking) orientation in Scandinavia since the 1920s. In the case of the treatment of people with disabilities in Hitler's Germany, one can ask how was it possible that anthroposophical curative education was not corrupted

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1501-7419 Print/1745-3011 Online/05/030176–18
DOI: 10.1080/15017410500196761

or defeated during the Nazi period, but survived and experienced a phase of its most intensive growth after World War II?

These questions cannot be answered in depth without examining what kind of appeal anthroposophical ideas have had to co-workers who have stayed within the movement, and the potential these ideas had to generate good practise. This however, is not the focus of this article. After an introductory description of the history of the origins of anthroposophical services and the ideas that provide the foundation for this work, the theme of this article is the character and practise of the Steiner educational projects for people with disabilities under the Third Reich. Born in the heyday of racial hygiene, and with a phase of establishment and expansion parallel to the growth of National Socialism in Germany, this reform movement for people with disabilities faced definite, serious challenges. Was it possible for a movement with ambitions which cut across the National Socialist programme for "*Gleichschaltung*" (forced standardization) to go through this phase without becoming ideologically corrupted or annihilated in human, material and social terms? This article examines the conditions under which these institutions existed and the strategies that were used in order to survive.

The history of the anthroposophical institutions as independent and idealistic based projects under a totalitarian regime shows, among other things, the potential of a role as an outsider under certain political and social conditions. Not all aspects of this history have been systematically covered, so the following history, which is based on available source material, certainly has its gaps. A central reference for the following presentation is Uwe Werner's documentation *Die Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (*The anthroposophists in Nazi times*) (1999), which is based on a wide range of public and private archive material. Brigitte Kaldenberg's, as yet unpublished, survey of the history of the development of anthroposophical curative education (2004) also deserves mention. We also find an important contribution in Henzels Göttes' thesis *Erfahrungen mit Schulautonomie: das Beispiel der Freien Waldorfschulen* (*Experiences with school autonomy – the example of the free Waldorf schools*) (2000). This work contains a thorough presentation of Waldorf schools as political and educational factors under the Third Reich, with the discussion focussing upon the principle of autonomy, or in other words, the position of the outsider. As the main sources for the presentation of what exactly happened in detail, and how people behaved, this literature is, in any case inadequate, but a series of autobiographical or biographical notes based on private archives and interviews (Strohschein 1967, Pickert 1991, Uhlenhoff 1994, Zeylmans van Emmichoven 1992, Girke 1995, Goyert 1999, Grimm 1999, Selg 2002, 2004, Kon 2004). The history of how pre-war eugenic thought gradually met its downfall after World War II as a result of Hitler's instigation of the euthanasia program as the ultimate solution to social tasks, is well known.

Behind this history lie individual histories, stories covering a plethora of local human dilemmas and choices that span from capitulation in the form of a corrupt ideology, through ambivalent survival strategies to operationalized idealism, such as, Göttes' (2000) and Klees' (1983) accounts demonstrate.

One of the purposes of this article is to allow characteristics of such a local history to become known beyond the boundaries of an internal circle. Beyond this history's value for anthroposophists' self-understanding, the history of anthroposophical curative education in the Third Reich may disclose dilemmas and experiences for professional reflection on how to act on behalf of others. Within the boundaries of professional and political reality, it was then, as it is now, often difficult to put into perspective the ideological and human implications of the actions and compromises that were made. To the degree in which this is the history of a milieu that actually managed to survive the era of national socialism in Germany while maintaining its life and integrity, the intention here is to draw attention to the trains of thought as well as to the human and strategic characteristics that have contributed to this. We are dealing with the art of the possible in the span between idealism and pragmatism.

Origin of Anthroposophical Curative Education

The particularly anthroposophical initiatives for people with disabilities spring from the "*Heilpädagogik*" (curative education) tradition, as it is called, based in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. For key works within these activities see Georgens and Deinhardt (1861/1863), Trüper (1883), Heller (1904) and Hanselmann (1930). As the name shows, this is an impulse with a medical background as well as an educational one, often combined with an ideal of social reform. The writers mentioned all had in common that they also led institutions in which they themselves were active in practical work. Before proceeding further, we must look closer at the concept "*Heilpädagogik*". It was introduced by Georgens and Deinhardt (1861), and in short, it covers the understanding, treatment and education of children and young people with disabilities. In general, one can say that the concept gives a broad definition of disability with intellectual development disturbance as the core category. Hanselmann's book *Einführung in die Heilpädagogik* was published in Sweden in 1939 under the title "*Läkepedagogik*" (Hanselmann 1939a). In Denmark the term "*heilpædagogik*" was used (Hanselmann 1939b). That the tradition of "*Heilpädagogik*" has had influence in Scandinavia has already been mentioned on several occasions (Söder 1979, Simonsen 2000, Froestad & Simonsen 2001, Askildt 2004). As a common term, however, the "*Heilpädagogik*" concept has not come into widespread use here. In Scandinavia the term applies only to specifically anthroposophical ideas and practice, such as *läkepedagogik* in Sweden, *helsepædagogikk* in Denmark and *helsepedagogikk* in Norway. Similarly, the term curative education applies only to the Steiner or Waldorf educational undertakings for people with disabilities in the English-speaking world. How fitting the original translations were, and how well they apply today, is a question for discussion. In this article, the term "heilpedagogy" is used when referring to the professional tradition in the German language. "Curative education" is the term applied to specifically anthroposophical practices.

Also in anthroposophical curative education there is an historical basis in educational, as well as in medical and social practice. A class for children with special needs was set up in the early years of the first Steiner or Waldorf School in Stuttgart, established in 1919. The following year, an anthroposophical hospital was opened in Arlesheim, near Basel, under the leadership of Dr Ita Wegman. Among the patients was a smaller group of children with various forms of intellectual and behavioural problems (Uhlenhoff 1992). The sanatorium for young adult patients at Sophienhöhe near Jena stands as a third starting point. In its thriving period, it was an institution of educational reform with close connections to the dynamic psychological and educational departments of the University of Jena (Trüper & Trüper 1978, Stafseng 1996). When its founder and leader Johannes Trüper died, the institution suffered great professional loss, which gradually developed into crisis. In 1923, three young anthroposophists: Siegfried Pickert (Pickert 1991, Grimm in Bucha et. al. 2002), Albrecht Strohschein (Strohschein 1967, Kon 2004) and Franz Löffler (Girke 1995) were employed there. Within a short time they had success with courses in Steiner education for co-workers and applied methods adapted to the pupils with the most severe special needs. After some months however, the institution doctors from the University of Jena, put a stop to all further development in the direction of anthroposophy. In reaction to this, the three opened the first anthroposophical home for curative education outside Jena in 1924: *Heil- und Erziehungsinstitut für seelenpflege-bedürftige Kinder*, in Lauenstein (*Curative and Educational Institute for Children in Need of Care of the Soul*). The original intention was to name the place "*Home for Pathological and Epileptic Children*". Steiner however recommended a name that clearly signalled what went on there. His comment was: "We have to choose a name that does not immediately stigmatize the children" (Strohschein 1967: 216). At a time when any disability was generally explained in derogatory terms, this title, referring to needs, must be said to be a radical gesture.

Curative Education Lessons

On the request of these three pioneers, Rudolf Steiner gave a course of lectures in curative education early in the summer of 1924 (Steiner 1981). The course is characterized by having come into being within a specific context, with specific references and as an answer to specific needs. While books on the subject from the beginning of the century and up to the years when Steiner worked, can read like catalogues of symptoms with a depressive undertone, Steiner's course is first and foremost treatment-orientated, and stands apart because of the way relational and ethical questions are related to the issue. The literature of the period in describing "abnormal", "psychopathic", or "inferior" children (these were the terms used at the time, and which Steiner also used), either shows a view of normality as an ideal standard and a goal at which treatment of the abnormal was aimed (Trüper 1893: 5), or used the term in this way without discussing it (Heller 1904,

Ziehen 1917, Strohmayer 1923). Steiner took a more modern position in introducing a relative concept of normality:

> But now the only possible grounds we can have for speaking of the normality or the abnormality of the child's life of soul, or indeed of the life of soul of any human being, is that we have in mind something that is normal in sense of average. There is no other criterion than the one that is customary among people who abide by ordinary conventions. At present there is really no other criterion. That is why the conclusions people come to are so very confused. When they have in this way ascertained the existence of "abnormality", they begin to do – heaven knows what! – believing they are thereby helping to get rid of the abnormality, while all the time they are driving out a fragment of genius! (Steiner 1981: 17).

The concept of developmental retardation as an incarnation disturbance is one of the most unique aspects of Steiner's thinking. Steiner did not reject ideas of heredity or environment, but introduced a third feature – that of the incarnating individual. The core of the individuality was inviolate and so beyond "healthy" or "pathological". His descriptions of processes of incarnation are those, which for most people, are the most difficult to understand in the whole course. Considering the challenge from the practice of the National Socialists, founded on ideas of racial hygiene, which followed historically, it is important to emphasize that the concept of reincarnation includes a downplaying of the importance of heredity. In this respect, he stands apart from child psychology and heilpedagogy at that time, which viewed heredity as the dominant factor in the causes (Heller 1904, Ziehen 1917, Strohmayer 1923). In former lectures he had dissociated himself from biological determinism which influenced professions such as criminal anthropology, and warned against the social and ethical results of such ideas (Steiner 1984).

Expansion and Consolidation

The number of children at Lauenstein increased rapidly, and the first branching out occurred in 1925. After ten years there were approximately 16 institutions of this kind in Europe. Institutions such as Gerswalde, Pilgramshain and Lauenstein were previously manor estates, with surrounding garden, park and tenant farming. The material standards of the interior were both impractical and outdated. They housed children with various degrees of developmental retardation as well as a number of children with social problems. There could be between 60 and 120 children at each place. From a contemporary viewpoint one could say that each place had an institutional character with large dormitories and dining rooms. Looking back on the early years co-workers tend to emphasize the family atmosphere of each place. This may also be an adequate description, as even co-workers who had their own families lived in direct contact with the children's groups and shared in common daily routines, without any particular demands for leisure time or a private life. Each institution had their own resident doctor who not only tended to medical affairs but also shared in the cultural life of the community on equal terms with the rest of co-workers. All children had

the opportunity to go to school, even those who at that time in general would be judged as uneducable.

The category "uneducable" in contemporary thought included not only people with severe multiple disabilities, but also children whom we would today regard as having more moderate intellectual disabilities. The teaching followed the plans for the Steiner schools. Children of co-workers might attend the lower classes. Artistic and cultural activities, such as music and dramatic arts, were common elements used to mark the course of the year and to lift routine patterns. Artists were to be found among the co-workers who could actively contribute to the development of what was later to become a notable music tradition, characteristic of anthroposophical work. At meetings for co-workers, which were held when the children were in bed, the co-workers discussed topical issues and maintained a continuous study of Steiner's writings, mainly the "*Curative Education Course*" (Girke 1995, Grimm 1999, Kaldenberg 2004, Kon 2004). There was a strong network between the institutions. A lot of this contact went via Dr Wegman, who had taken over as a spiritual and organizational authority after Steiner's death in 1925. Correspondence between Ita Wegman and co-workers in the early pioneer phase bears witness to great visions for the work, and correspondingly great problems, conflicts, lack of personnel and economic difficulties. It also tells of mutual support however, not least through the exchange of co-workers (correspondence in Ita Wegman Archive, Arlesheim: "Lauenstein", Zeylmans van Emmichoven 1992, Selg 2002, 2004).

Disability Politics in the Third Reich

As one of his first acts after being appointed Chancellor in January 1933, Hitler ensured the safe passage of the sterilization law "*Gesetzt zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*" (*Law to prohibit hereditary degeneration*), which came into force in January 1934. The aim was to prevent a general degeneration of the people by making so-called inferior individuals incapable of reproduction. Even though the Catholics opposed the law for religious reasons, the law was welcomed in almost all social groups, from doctors and lawyers through to charities, the evangelical church and the public in general according to Klee (1983: 36, see also Foss 2001). The introduction of this law was not a specific Nazi practise, it rather reflected handicap policies in the majority of European countries and the USA at that time, as idiocy or mental retardation in its intellectual and moral form was regarded as a hereditary defect. As a result sterilization was regarded as a way to combat illness (Kirkebæk 1993, Foss 2001, Froestad & Simonsen 2001, Simonsen 2000). Auxiliary school pupils were one of the first groups to appear in the limelight. The weakest pupils at these schools – those incapable of work – were separated out and sent to institutions, where many of them were later to become victims of killings. At the same time funds allocated to the institutions were cut and after a time the material and personnel conditions became extremely poor (Klee 1983, Winter 1994). Many of the special schools were shut down, while the number of students per teacher was increased.

Sengstock, Magerhans-Hurley & Sprotte (1990) describe how teachers in special education were involved in the implementation of the sterilization law. They were active in registering and preparing students for the operation and in post-operational care. Some cases of the intelligence tests used to select candidates for sterilization being sabotaged are reported, but have never been documented.

Whilst this occurred, Germany was preparing for war, and there was apparently no longer time to conduct population planning in a generational perspective. Sterilization in the dimensions that had been practised up to that time was cut back in 1939, and after a while was only conducted when there was "great danger of reproduction". The doctors were needed in other areas. Klee (1983: 86) estimates that the total number sterilized in the six year duration of the programme was somewhere between 200,000 and 350,000, whilst Winter (1994: 47) reports a figure of 400,000. In September 1939 Germany declared war on Poland, and in January 1940 the first death institution was started. It is interesting to note that the same view of humanity, which formed the basis of the sterilization practises, now formed the ideological foundation for the "euthanasia" killings that followed. The arguments were partially purity of race, partially social economics; the intention was to free labour from the caring professions while simultaneously saving food and fuel resources. As time went by the institutional buildings were also made use of, both for refugees and as barracks and field hospitals. A vital difference between the sterilization measures and the euthanasia action was that while law authorized the former, the latter was beyond its boundaries. A written authorization from Hitler, dated back to 1st September 1939, the day prior to the declaration of war against Poland (Klee 1983, Winter 1994), formed the basis of such a policy. The organized killing of disabled and psychiatric patients was called T4 action, and was conducted under the greatest possible degree of secrecy, using cover organizations and cover names.

What happened, in short, was that smaller institutions for mentally disabled people were gradually emptied as their patients were transferred, "*Verlegt*" to collection centres or larger state institutions without informing relatives in advance. "The transfer" was conducted on the basis of a registration form that the institutions were obliged to complete. A medical commission then proceeded to process the forms and seal the individual patient's fate with a cross. Special camouflaged buses transported the patients to one of the six gas institutions that were spread across the country. Execution in the gas chamber occurred on the day of arrival and cremation followed immediately. After some weeks relatives were given a so-called "consolatory letter" informing them that their dearest, due to "war technicalities", had had to be transferred at short notice to institution X, where the person concerned, after a short period of illness, had suffered a peaceful death from diagnosis Y (pneumonia, blood poisoning, epileptic attack, etc). Keeping these actions secret was not possible in the long term, both leaders and co-workers, together with patients, gradually became aware of what was happening. While the state institutions had introduced "the principle of leadership" with loyal Party members at the helm, it was from the

boards of the large evangelical and catholic institutions that opposition came. Documentation bears witness to a conflict among these leaders, between their thoughts on Christian compassion and patriotism and loyalty towards the authorities (Klee 1983). Protests occurred either in written form in the course of duty, or via moderate sabotage, where those who were regarded as weaker replaced "well-functioning" patients. Relatives also gradually became aware of what was happening. Various blunders in connection with, among other things, the causes of death and the dispatching of urns, ensured this. The euthanasia action was in the process of becoming a burden for the regime, and was "officially" called off in the autumn of 1941 after 70,273 people, according to internal statistics, had lost their lives in the gas chambers (Klee 1983: 340, Winter 1994: 117).

Younger children were, in principle, not sent to the gas institutions. Physically disabled and mentally retarded children were referred to separate children's wards within hospitals, so-called "*Kinderfachabteilungen*". In certain cases it appears that the parents were forced to surrender their children to these wards, but, on the whole, home-based children were protected. It was the children in hospitals or those who had been signed into an institution who were in the greatest danger. The children concerned underwent a procedure of underfeeding combined with overdoses of sedatives. Much of what went on within these special children's wards was legitimized as research, and also continued after 1941 (Klee 1983).

Anthroposophical Activities Under National Socialism

When Hitler came to power in 1933, there were eight anthroposophical institutions for disabled people in Germany, among these two Steiner schools for pupils with learning disabilities (Zeylmans van Emmichoven 1992, Werner 1999, Kaldenberg 2004). Like other private institutions for people with disabilities, the anthroposophical institutions found themselves in a vulnerable position. As initiatives with their roots in an anthroposophical impulse these institutions were under a twofold attack, something that separated them from the confessional institutions that are among those covered by Klees' (1983) research. In accordance with Hitler's vision of "*Gleichschaltung*" a series of political organizations, sects and other types of competing alternative lifestyle groups soon became subjects of surveillance, pressure, public harassment and, in due course, bans and persecution. One Nazi report from 1933 concluded by saying that the anthroposophical worldview was "thoroughly pacifist and international in nature and therefore impossible to unite with National Socialism's thoughts on blood, race, people and the totalitarian state" (Werner 1999: 67). The Anthroposophical Society was declared not just an enemy of the state, but also a danger to it, and was forbidden as of 1st November 1935. The same applied to anthroposophical literature (Werner 1999: 47). For the anthroposophical subsidiary organizations the prolonged and complex fight for survival using an already impenetrable bureaucracy with differing regional levels that had now received a parallel subsidy from the Nationalist Party apparatus (Werner 1999: 18)

now began. When power was transferred the anthroposophical movement in Germany was a miscellaneous affair comprised of two societies, biodynamic agriculture and research, an alternative medicine and a hospital together with the production of remedies, a publishing house and periodicals, eurhythmy schools and eight Waldorf schools besides the curative educational operations (Werner 1999: 5).

In accordance with the anthroposophists' principle of autonomy for individuals and organizations, the movement did not represent an organizational union, rather a network of personal contacts and case-related cooperation. This was now an advantage as a formal connection between operations and the forbidden society could not be proved. Even so almost all subsidiaries were successfully banned or formally shut down, either voluntarily or as a result of actions by National Socialists. While the curative educational homes in the first period after 1933, on the whole managed to remain out of the spotlight, the eight Waldorf schools rapidly came into conflict with the educational and political authorities when they expressed opposition to the increasing demands of "*Gleischaltung*" placed upon the school leaders and objected to the Nazification of lessons. The schools viewed themselves as cultural islands in a brutalized contemporary society, but they were willing to a certain degree to adjust in order to survive. Before wide-ranging compromise or bans had eliminated the schools, they decided notwithstanding to close in succession (Werner 1999, Götte 2000). The only Waldorf schools that paradoxically enough upheld their existence throughout the duration of the Nazi period were two auxiliary schools. When the Stuttgart Waldorf School was closed in 1938, the auxiliary class, with approximately 20 pupils, continued in a private flat in the vicinity. The Nazis were aware of the school and the school openly conducted its daily outings to a nearby park without anybody intervening. None of the pupils were victims of euthanasia, Uhlenhoff writes (1994: 258). A similar situation applied to the Steiner educational auxiliary school in Breslau. Established more or less after the transfer of power – in 1934 – it continued to operate with its 100 pupils up to 1945, whilst the ordinary Waldorf School in the same town closed down in 1939 (Uhlenhoff 1994, Werner 1999, Kaldenberg 2004).

Increasing Problems – the Law on Sterilization

Of the Anthroposophical Society in the1930s, Werner (1999: 5) writes that it appeared apolitical and introspective – mainly preoccupied with its own problems. Large financial deficits and deep internal division afflicted the movement. Dr Ita Wegman, who was head of the medical section at Goetheanum – in which the curative educational activities were organized, was nevertheless aware of what was underway at an early stage. From 1931 onwards, she took measures to warn her associates and to secure curative educational undertakings (Selg 2002, Werner 1999). She initiated a meeting in April 1933, to discuss the political situation in Germany, which she described as "… bizarre, and extremely difficult to sort out, because evil is so cleverly disguised and even gives the illusion of being right" (Zeylmans van

Emmichoven 1992: 189, translation B. E.). Wegman put forward thoughts of transferring anthroposophical activities to England, and likewise of evacuating Jewish children, but without gaining support for her ideas. At the same time she urged her associates to build a strategy against the sterilization law (Selg 2002: 67). She made preparations for the emerging situation by implementing the greatest possible degree of autonomy for each home, including the reduction or discontinuation of correspondence, and the dissolution of *Soziale Hilfe* (Social Support) – the umbrella organization for curative educational activities seated in Berlin (Kaldenberg 2004). Internal relations between people and places were simultaneously to be strengthened (Zeylmans van Emmichoven 1992, Selg 2002).

These tactics seem to have had an effect during the first years. During the years 1934 and 1935, numerous reports from the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) (Security Service) remained inside the Gestapo's drawers (Werner 1999: 162). Problems were increasing locally, however. A growing distrust of the mentally disabled children – as well as of the anthroposophists – from the local population both at Gerswalde (Girke 1995) and at Pilgramshain is reported. Individuals from the village organized and donned uniforms, demonstrating an increasingly apparent antagonism. The "poor villagers" became more and more insecure, letting themselves be directed. One could no longer speak freely, and gradually the local people ceased to take the most severely retarded children along for errands in the village, according to Lore Wilmar (in Grimm 1999: 44). As one of the first direct attacks on anthroposophical institutions, the large mortgage loan that had made possible the purchase of Gerswalde was cancelled at two weeks' notice. The institution only just managed to rise private funding to carry on their work (Girke 1995).

The *1934 Law on Sterilization* came as a first major challenge. Edmund Drebber, who was a doctor at Gerswalde, gave the following account of the situation: "The content of these laws was inconsistent with our view of human rights. We therefore, rejected and opposed it from the very beginning." (Drebber in Girke 1995: 100, translation B. E.). This violation of the individual's human rights could be felt in many ways. Löffler (in Girke 1995) gives an account of a young boy who was saved from a sterilization order, but who, personally, was never able to recover from the wounds inflicted on him by the procedures he had to go through. From a psychosomatic point of view there were reasons for scepticism, too, since to the anthroposophist the human body and soul are closely linked. The idea of perfecting a population through the elimination of inferior individuals was not compatible with the logics of reincarnation. Beyond a willed improvement on a social, cultural or political level, a development of humanity, according to the anthroposophy, could not take place in any other way than through the development of the individual. Thoughts like these were among the reasons that all kinds of artistic, cultural and religious activities played such an important part in the various anthroposophical centres and institutions.

Drebber (in Girke 1995) goes on to relate how – through numerous co-worker meetings – they tried to find loopholes in the Law, and ways of rescuing the pupils from its reach. Parents were informed of its consequences,

and as far as possible the youths concerned were discharged and taken home. For some, however, there were no alternatives, as they were already registered in name and diagnosis with the senior doctor in the area. Franz Löffler himself took part in the negotiations with "*Erbgesundheitsgerichten*" (Racial hygiene court) for as many children as he was allowed to. For some of the pupils, surgery could not be prevented – due to their parents' wishes or consent, Dr Drebber writes (in Girke 1995: 100). There are no similar accounts from the other institutions, but in a 1949 memorandum, the head of Lauenstein-Altefeld, Dr Heinrich Hardt, wrote:

> During the entire Nazi era, no single child under my medical direction has been subject to sterilization. No child has been sent away to a violent death – which was attempted with five of the children. No associate of mine or myself has ever been a member of the NSDAP. (Hardt 29th May 1949, Private Archive Uhlenhoff, translation B. E.).

Public Inspections – the Threat of "Euthanasia"

As the sterilization operations were phased down in favour of the "euthanasia" program, an increasing number of public inspections took place. In Gerswalde one-third of the children were of Jewish origin, and consequently at double risk (Girke 1995, Kaldenberg 2004). In order to save pupils, various resorts were found. Particularly ill and vulnerable children were formally discharged (even though they still lived in the homes), and were kept hidden during the inspections (Uhlenhoff 1994: 266). At Gerswalde it is reported that a small private house located in the park was used for this purpose (Werner 1999). At Lauenstein-Altefeld, helpers managed to divert the attention of the Nazi inspectors so that the more severely handicapped children staying in the house were not discovered. Pupils who were sufficiently mobile were taken into the wood along with co-workers, taking baskets of darning filled with prohibited Steiner books. When the inspectors arrived, it was chiefly the children of the co-workers who were present. A man of Jewish origin relates how his life was saved as a boy, when Dr Hardt gave him an injection and hid him under a pile of wood in the cellar during an inspection (Kaldenberg 2004). From Hamborn, Siegfried Pickert recalled that helpers brought children to a log cabin in the wood every day, in order to keep them out of reach of their adversaries (Kaldenberg 2004).

As mentioned, parents of particularly vulnerable children were encouraged to take them home, since this ensured a greater degree of protection. Two severely retarded boys were taken from Gerswalde though, and admitted to the hospital in Templin. When a co-worker visited them there, she found them physically run-down and heavily drugged. She saved their lives by demanding their discharge, oddly enough, succeeding in this. She then brought them to a place in Buchenwald, where she lived with them until the end of the war (Uhlenhoff 1994). In two reported cases (Goyert 1999, Kon 2004), pupils who were sent home later on were transferred by their parents to other institutions, where they subsequently fell victims of "euthanasia". In some cases matters came to open confrontations. When the head of the institution

Eckwälden, Dr Franz Geraths, received instructions to "transfer" two of the pupils, he went personally to the District Physician's office with a note of protest and refused to discharge the children. Dr Geraths, who was threatened with arrest and the closure of Eckwälden, relates: "I told him that I was prepared to be arrested and that my successor would follow in my footsteps, which obviously disarmed Dr Mauthe" (cited after Klee 1983: 273, translation B. E.). Both pupils, Dr Geraths, and the institution were saved.

As stated earlier, children with Jewish backgrounds were in the greatest danger. One multi-handicapped girl of a Jewish family was adopted by Dr Hardt at Lauenstein, while the rest of her family fled the country. During the winter of 1938/39 she died of influenza, but was denied a burial in the Germanic ground of Altefeld cemetery. Dr Hart consequently kept the urn on his desk throughout the war, "in expectation of better times" (Reuter in Grimm 1999: 112). A number of Jewish children were sent to Switzerland and admitted to the Sonnenhof home in Arlesheim. This enabled their parents to emigrate to countries not admitting disabled people; USA and South America among others. Werner (1999): 345) writes that some of these people still live in anthroposophical institutions in Switzerland. The situation was also difficult for co-workers members of Jewish origin. The well-known physician Dr Karl König who had been at Pilgramshain since 1928, was among those who had to flee because of their Jewish ancestry. In 1936 he took his family with him to settle in Vienna. Here he gathered around him a circle of young people with social and anthroposophical interests, with whom he studied until he had to escape once more in 1938. It was this group of people who subsequently started a curative educational centre outside Aberdeen in 1938. This was the beginning of the Camphill movement (Kaldenberg 2004, Kon 2004).

The actual or formal discharges, which often took place from one day to the next, as well as the suspension of public financial support – everyone was now "a private payer", or could not pay at all – meant increasing financial insecurity and shortage of resources. The consequences were carried by the whole community. To utilize capacity and secure their economy, all the homes took in outside children for holidays and gradually also for evacuation. When Germany went to war in 1939, male co-workers members were mobilized and did not offer resistance. The army was preferable to the Gestapo. The women were left with much of the responsibility.

The June 1941 Campaign

All things considered, the largest threat to the pupils was the risk of institutions being closed down. While individuals within the local bureaucracy may well have felt sympathy for the pupils and respected the work carried out – and while this provided a chance of obtaining protection (Kaldenberg 2004, Werner 1999) – it was by way of being anthroposophical undertakings that the institutions were most at peril. The ruling authorities realized that the 1935 ban had not been successful in stopping the activity of the anthroposophists, and under the command of the Chief of the German Security Police, Reinhardt Heydrich, an effective and "*restlos*" (restless)

campaign was launched against anthroposophical ventures and similar "occult teachings and secret societies" (Werner 1999: 303, Kaldenberg 2004). Werner estimates that roughly one-fifth of the former 7000 organized members of the Anthroposophical Society were confronted with the police. Several prominent members were arrested. Accounts from the curative educational homes then relate how, on the morning of 9th June 1941, the Gestapo drew up in their black limousines, carrying orders of confiscation, closure, and the arrests – or "relocation" – of co-workers and members.

Before this time Pilramshain had already been emptied in the fall of 1940, in order to make room for returned German expatriates. Approximately 120 pupils, carers and their children were living there at the time. When possible, pupils were collected by their parents, but 25 pupils from the age of 3 years and over, and their helpers; with clothes, equipment and smaller pieces of furniture, were sent north. After a long and hard journey and four changes of trains, they arrived at Gerswalde north of Berlin on 25th October 1940. There children and co-worker were "greeted with happiness", writes Reinhardt (in Grimm 1999: 87). With the pupils who had remained at Pilgramshain, they moved into the outhouse buildings, which had no kitchen or sanitary devices. They were also allowed to rent a few rooms with friendly villagers, where the most severely disabled children were accommodated. The institution's bank account was blocked, but Strohschein had been foresighted enough to withdraw a few thousand marks beforehand, so that they were able to get by through the winter. It goes with the story that in this situation co-workers continued their regular study of Steiner's works.

On 9th June 1941 there was a raid against those remaining at Pilgramshain. Early in the morning Gestapo's representatives arrived at the village in a black limousine. A raid was undertaken; all anthroposophical literature was confiscated, and the rooms were sealed. Co-workers and members were interrogated. They were told that they were "victims to false doctrine, and that these pathological children were consuming food and labour needed elsewhere, now that the country was at war". Strohschein was put under arrest, but was released after three weeks. To avoid the Gestapo, he reported himself to Wehrmacht. Several among the co-workers were called up for active service. They somehow managed, however, to care for the group of disabled children which had been placed in the outhouses and in the village (Wilmar in Grimm 1999).

A raid was also undertaken at Lauenstein-Altefeld. The military administration wished to take over the place – a former stud farm – to raise horses from the plundered Poland. They were offered another place in Northern Germany as compensation. Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, leader of the *Abwehr*, the German spy organisation, had two children in the home, one registered as a pupil and one temporarily evacuated. He is reported to have played an important part in this unusual bargaining, and in general to have held a protecting hand over Lauenstein throughout the war. In the autumn of 1941, 80 children and 40 carers – most of them women – travelled north to Seewalde in the Mecklenburg area north of Berlin and during the next three years a new venture was built – both physically (for example a new house) as

well as culturally. The school started, and there were concerts and eurhythmy performances with guests from Berlin. However, there was only a small number of helpers to share in the work, and even Ursula Wedepol, who was only a young girl at that time, tells how she worked as a helper (in Grimm 1999: 122, see also Kaldenberg 2004).

Haus Spitzner at Bonnewitz, situated not far from the "euthanasia" gassing centre Sonnenstein close to Pirna, was one of the places to undergo a raid, and a few months later had to close down. The buildings were given to Hitlerjugend. The approximately 35 pupils were handed over to their parents, but two pupils who had nowhere to go to were hidden in the village together with a carer and later admitted to another of the anthroposophical homes. The headmaster was arrested because of his refusal to comply with the request to close the place down. He was executed in KZ Oranienburg in February 1942. A smaller place with some 20 pupils close to Karlsruhe also had to close after the June campaign, and the head was detained for a short period of time (Werner 1999). The large institution Schloss Hamborn was likewise seized and closed after a dramatic raid. Pupils were given eight days to be sent home, but a group of children and co-workers were allowed to stay behind in one of the houses that had been privatized (Kaldenberg 2004).

At Gerswalde, an open conflict with the authorities had already surfaced in August 1934, when Löffler refused to meet the demand to register the institution with NS-Volkswohlfart (NSV). It is clear from the reports that to Löffler, the demand for "*Gleichschaltung*" would have been tantamount to closing the home. To include a National Socialist on the board of Gerswalde would cut into "the community of fate built up by the co-workers" in an intolerable way. Although the executive officer referred to this attitude as "downright hostile to the State", Löffler still managed to obtain admission in the NSV, without conceding to the "*Führerprinzip*". This kind of resistance though, did not succeed everywhere, and places like Hamborn as well as Eckwälden were compelled to make formal concessions to the Nazis (Werner 1999: 164). In the spring of 1941 there was a written order from Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) that Gerswalde was to be closed and seized, and Löffler put under arrest, as had happened with the other homes. It appears that the personal attitude and courage of a young lawyer inside the administration directly contributed to the fact that Gerswalde survived the June campaign. In a report from 1950 this lawyer relates his meeting with Franz Löffler:

> Even if any of us at that time had any notions of the future dimensions of the Euthanasia programme, he made it quite clear that he would work against any such development. I approved of his attitude. It contradicted my sense of justice that a person, just because of his ethical objectives, should be stopped in carrying out his beneficial work. I was therefore determined to save Löffler" (Husmann in Girke 1995: 110).

At Gerswalde then, life could go on, although frequently interrupted by Gestapo inspections. Löffler too was arrested, but was released after three days. But Gerswalde was still not clear of the danger of being confiscated for war purposes, and Löffler therefore took steps to counteract this threat. The estate, which still housed the former pupils of Pilgramshain in addition to

Gerswalde's own pupils as well as co-workers and their families, was opened up for various new uses. From Düsseldorf they received more than 20 children who had to be evacuated from the air raids. When the children's ward at the hospital in the nearest town, Templin, was destroyed, it was transferred to the first floor of the castle and the doctors of Gerswalde took over responsibility for it. Later on, the residents of a nearby old people's home moved into the stable. Pressure was somewhat eased through this, and until further notice, work could be kept going with a fair amount of composure, writes Girke (1995: 111, Reinhardt in Grimm 1999).

The End of the War

As the war drew to a close, Allied bombing raids against the cities increased. At night one could see from Gerswalde the red reflection of the fires ravaging Berlin. In this insecure situation, someone proposed the idea of rehearsing Mozarts' "The Magic Flute". The arias and choruses now sounding through the corridors helped to ease the pressure a little, both for children and co-workers, Girke writes (1995: 114). In the end of April 1945, Gerswalde was proclaimed a war zone. The decision was made to stay with the pupils, but it was up to each individual co-worker whether to leave the place. Most stayed put. Air raids increased, but now the ruin of a medieval castle, which was located on the premises, came into its own, acting as a bomb shelter. In the village, houses were in flames, people fled, and on the night of 29th April 1945, 50 local inhabitants committed suicide. Many escaped to Gerswalde, where they found refuge. Owing to an SS unit that had occupied the castle for some time but then dispersed overnight, leaving their food supplies behind, the people of Gerswalde managed to get through the next months.

In the Easter of 1945 it became apparent that the Russian army was drawing closer. As a measure to counteract fear of the Russians, Löffler gave lectures on Russian culture and of the bearing of the Resurrection on the Easter celebrations in the Orthodox Eastern Church. When the Russian tanks arrived at the village the next morning, Löffler and a Russian-speaking female helper came to meet them, carrying a white flag (Girke 1995, Reinhardt in Grimm 1999). After short negotiations they surrendered, and the Russian troops, who for the most part consisted of Mongolian soldiers, moved into the castle. What now could have broken lose, was prevented by a couple of Russian-speaking co-workers and "typhoid" warning signs on the doors to the children's quarters. An emergency hospital run by Gerswalde's two female physicians had been established in the basement. In spite of everything, they had survived without any of the children or co-workers losing their lives, and after things had calmed down somewhat, Löffler arranged a thanksgiving celebration. The situation was gradually normalized. A study of Steiner's book *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1999) was begun, and to lighten the atmosphere they rehearsed the comedy "*Turandot*" by Schiller, which was played, among other places, in the local inn that was the hangout of the Russian-Mongolian soldiers (Girke 1995, Reinhardt in Grimm 1999).

After the War

By the conclusion of War three of the original eight anthroposophical children's homes in Germany were left, only one of them; Eckwälden, located in Western Germany. Like Gerswalde, Seewalde had survived the spring of 1945 by a narrow margin (Wedepol in Grimm 1999, Kaldenberg 2004). Little by little things had calmed down and a sort of normal life was resumed. But the pleasure did not last very long. Both Gerswalde as well as Seewalde were located in the eastern Zone. In the same way that they had not been accepted by the National Socialists, these private institutions were not welcome in the DDR. After years under pressure due to the Nazis' "*Vererbungswahn*" ("heredity madness"), now came the pressure of the communists' "*Umwelts-wahn*", ("environment madness"), as Löffler expressed it (in Girke 1995: 124). Again, on the agenda came official inspections, demands concerning the content of teaching, political approval of the co-workers etc. Löffler was held under arrest for one month, and Hardt was threatened with forced labour. In 1949 Seewalde was seized by the State and Gerswalde as well in1950. Löffler, his co-workers and a group of "western pupils" came over to West Berlin and there they established a new school. After the unification of Germany in 1989 the anthroposophists succeeded in repossessing Seewalde. Today there is a living and working community there (Kaldenberg 2004).

The post-war rehabilitation period was relatively short, thanks to Werner Pache of Dornach and people like him, who organized and undertook a number of relief transports to Germany and France. The shipments carried letters between colleagues who had been cut off from contact with each other during the war, giving them an opportunity to re-establish their network. The formerly regular conferences in Arlesheim and Dornach were taken up again shortly after the re-opening of the borders (Grimm in Buchka, Grimm & Klein 2002, Kaldenberg 2004).

Discussion

So far, this is the story of a movement that, on the whole, survived the Nazi period in Germany with its integrity intact, and without great human losses. If we were to attempt to identify the possible causes for this, several aspects of ideological as well as of a pragmatic nature may be pointed out. The immunity against National Socialism and its biologically based concepts of human life was rooted in the anthroposophical view of the individual as an inviolable entity, developing through the interaction of a cultural community. In accordance with these, genetics was not an important parameter in Steiner's Curative Education, which, on the contrary, disassociated itself from a normative way of thinking. Through the continual study of anthroposophy, which only seems to have been intensified as the external pressure increased, such ideas were kept alive among co-workers in the curative educational institutions. Curative education was instigated due to the exclusion of the young anthroposophists by the University doctors at the Trüper's Institute in Jena. Anthroposophists were able to distance themselves from contemporary

medicine and children's psychiatry, and ideas could be put into practice, since the homes had their own physicians. As we have seen previously, hospital-based medicine was one of the most serious threats to disabled children. We also find a struggle for independence in the relations with public organizations, and also internally between the anthroposophical institutions. On the other hand there was a strong internal community spirit, with an idealism characteristic of pioneers. The requirements for solidarity were present; not only between the co-workers, but also between co-workers and pupils. Both of these groups were under persecution – the first because they thought differently, the second because they were different. Leaders were authorized to make decisions, and at the same time they had the support of a closed circle of co-workers. The individual courage and decisiveness of these leaders seems to have gained the respect from, and concessions from individuals inside the bureaucracy. Notwithstanding the ideological orientation, a considerable degree of pragmatism and willingness to compromise is apparent. It is surprising to see the relatively large operational slack that the situation permitted after all: with room for mutual help, personal influence and creative sabotage – for those who had the courage. As an alternative professional movement, anthroposophical curative education was in an outsider's position. In the Germany of National Socialism, this may have had a lifesaving effect. When the mainstream takes the wrong direction, outsiders can be assigned important tasks.

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