GOETHEANUM COMMUNICATIONS

 Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland, 3 September 2024

**Opportunism served “to save the soil”**

**Study on the Biodynamic movement and Demeter in Nazi Germany**

**A study on the Biodynamic Movement and Demeter in Nazi Germany describes the proximity of the biodynamic movement to the Nazi regime, even though the movement never adopted any central Nazi ideologemes such as antisemitism.**

The study carried out by Jens Ebert, Susanne zur Nieden and Meggi Pieschel found that the biodynamic movement became “part of the complex overlapping structure of the Nazi party and state system.” The three authors – a journalist and author, a historian and a landscape planner – have sifted through documents since 2020, including 10,000 pages from the National Socialist party as well as ministry files: material from more than 30 archives and estates in total. This broad base of sources has been used by the study team to put together a clear and differentiated presentation of the biodynamic movement‘s complex history.

Rather than disband themselves, the members of the biodynamic associations decided in favour of the Gleichschaltung, which ultimately led to the founding of the ‘Reichsverband [Reich association] for the application of the biodynamic method in agriculture and horticulture’. Since 1934, there had been repeated institutional links between the biodynamic movement and National Socialism under the protection of Rudolf Hess among others. There was however also disagreement within the Nazi regime on whether to promote, prevent or ban biodynamic farming. The critical view biodynamic farmers had of chemicals was considered problematic by the agricultural industry, including IG Farben [a major German chemical and pharmaceutical company], with nitrogen being used as a fertiliser and for explosives. When Rudolf Hess flew to Great Britain in 1941 and was arrested there, this power struggle came to an end as the Gestapo dissolved the ‘Reichsverband’. Nevertheless, as a result of Heinrich Himmler‘s interest, individual representatives of biodynamic agriculture collaborated in crop growing in the Dachau, Ravensbrück and Mauthausen concentration camps and on a Ukrainian experimental farm in Wertingen.

The study team views the influential protagonists as caught in the field of tension between adaptation and the struggle to keep the biodynamic approach alive. Erhard Bartsch, for instance, who was the head of the Reichsverband, remained “above all a convinced anthroposophist” who “did not hold any anti-Semitic views”, but “supported the National Socialist state and admired the ‘personality’ of Adolf Hitler”. The study team‘s interpretation of his and the biodynamic movement‘s behaviour is that “the opportunism of the biodynamic farmers was largely driven by their mission to save the soil and their determination to help this economic method gain social acceptance as an idea and in practice.” The study team concludes that they did not find any support in biodynamic writings and publications for anti-Semitism, racism and chauvinism or for the destruction of ‘unworthy’ life; nor did all members agree with the approach of the biodynamic ‘Reichsverband’.

“We now know in detail to what extent the biodynamic movement was involved in National Socialism in Germany,” says Ueli Hurter who is co-leader of the Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum, adding that “as biodynamic practitioners today, we have even greater responsibility for human dignity. In 2020, we published a statement declaring that ‘The biodynamic movement stands for human rights, freedom of opinion, pluralism and cosmopolitanism and clearly distances itself from extremism and anti-human aspirations’.”

The study was commissioned by Demeter Germany, the Biodynamic Federation Demeter International and the Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum. It was funded by them and the Software Foundation, the Edith Maryon Foundation and the Rudolf Steiner Fund.

(570 words, 3784 characters/SJ; English by Margot M. Saar)

**Study (in German)** Jens Ebert, Susanne zur Nieden and Meggi Pieschel: Die biodynamische Bewegung und Demeter in der NS-Zeit. Akteure, Verbindungen, Haltungen [The biodynamic movement and Demeter in Nazi times. Protagonists, connections, attitudes], Metropol-Verlag, Berlin 2024

**Statement by the Demeter Association, the Biodynamic Federation Demeter International and the Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum** www.sektion-landwirtschaft.org/fileadmin/SLW/News/2020/Stellungnahme\_EN.pdf

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