

Breslau (Wrocław): In the footsteps of Rudolf Steiner

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Unless you consult an aged atlas, it is unlikely that you will find the city of 'Breslau' on a map - but in the summer of 1924, after each day of the Agriculture Course at Koberwitz (now Kobierzyce), Rudolf Steiner commuted to Breslau (now Wrocław). It was a journey of "forty-five minutes" (Steiner, 1924b, p.1) and he explained that:

The nearness of the Koberwitz estate to Breslau made it possible to unite the agricultural course with other anthroposophical work (1924b, p.9).

Most of the 111 attendees of the Koberwitz course commuted daily in the opposite direction (Paull, 2011). Steiner stated that:

Since the participants could not all stay overnight in Koberwitz, people had to come out from Breslau and usually arrived around eleven in the morning. Then the lecture began and lasted until around one o'clock, after which came the midday meal ... After this there was still a discussion on agricultural subjects which lasted until three o'clock. That was the Koberwitz side of the event (1924a, p.2).



Image 1: Steiner's karma lectures were delivered in the lecture hall on the fourth floor of Viktoria School (now Liceum Ogólnokształcące Nr 1).

Besides the Agriculture Course, Steiner reported that:

... many other events were going on. These other events took place in Breslau ... Each day concluded with a lecture for members of the Anthroposophical Society on questions relating to karma ... the subject was condensed to nine lectures (1924a, p.5).

The Agriculture Course was conducted at the Koberwitz chateau of Count Keyserlingk (Paull, 2013) while the events at Breslau were presented in the lecture hall (Image 1) on the top floor of Viktoria School (now Liceum Ogólnokształcące Nr 1) (Image 2).

As Steiner related:

The days were framed by the agriculture course and by the lectures for anthroposophical members at the end of the day. In between, a course on artistic speech-formation was given by Frau Dr. Steiner, and there were also two meetings with the Breslau youth group and two Class Lessons. And the last Sunday we were also given something extra. Herr Kuglemann arrived with his troupe of actors, who have taken up the suggestions given during the speech course here at the Goetheanum two years ago and are using them to develop new artistic forms for stage dramas. Their performance of Iphigenia (sic) proved to be a very promising development (1924a, p.6).



Image 2: Viktoria School (now Liceum Ogólnokształcące Nr 1) was the venue for Steiner's Breslau lectures.

The Australian anthroposophist Lute Drummond (1879-1949) later delivered a lecture 'Iphigenia', about the Greek legend, to the

Anthroposophical Society in London (Drummond, 1931). She went on to be the General Secretary (1935-1948) of the Anthroposophic Society in Australia (Paull, 2012). Drummond was in Dornach early in 1924 (Roe, 1996) and, with her interests in performance art, language and Iphigenia, she is a candidate for being present and involved in the Breslau performance although this remains unconfirmed. There was no Anglo presence at the Koberwitz course. Drummond later presented the play 'Iphigenia' at Castlecrag, Sydney, in 1935 as part of the Australian anthroposophists' winter festival (Spathopoulos, 2007).

Steiner estimated that "at a conservative estimate there are some 10,000 anthroposophists in Germany" (1924a, p.8). He reported that at Breslau "the halls were overflowing with members" (1924a, p.5-6). On the final evening, Monday 16 June, "there were still about three hundred and seventy members present" (p.6). "Most of the participants of the agriculture lectures attended everything" (Selg, 2010, p.10). Each evening after the karma lectures Steiner left at 11pm and returned in Count Keyserlingk's car to the Koberwitz chateau (Selg, 2010).

Steiner reported that the "days were full indeed" (1924a, p.6). Of agriculture, he declared that "under the influence of our modern philosophy of materialism, it is agriculture - believe it or not - that has deviated furthest from any truly rational principles" (p.3). He lamented that "we've lost the knowledge of what it takes to continue to care for the natural world" (p10).

Steiner reported on the prevailing conditions in Germany:

Among all these goings-on, there was still time for tours of the farms. We saw all there was to see, including ... some signs of Central Europe's collapsing economy ... the economic situation in Germany is certainly terrible (1924a, p.6).

It is clear that Steiner had forebodings for the future:

The general situation in Germany is depressing enough, but what is particularly depressing in Stuttgart is the financial situation of the Waldorf school ... financially the situation is just about hopeless, really hopeless. Just before Christmas, the Waldorf school's monthly budget was 6-8000 marks, but given the tremendous inflation rate in Germany, this amounts to 25-27,000 marks by now [June], which is a terrible state of affairs ... the present economic conditions in Germany ... do not look like they are going to get better very soon ... Part of the picture, of course, is the indescribable shortage of money in Germany at the moment. It's not that goods aren't available, but currency is so scarce that almost no circulation is possible. The economy of Central Europe is certainly in very bad shape (1924a, p.7-8).

Steiner died in 1925 so he did not live to witness the catastrophe of WWII that was to engulf Breslau. At the beginning of WWII, Breslau was a German city, as it had been for centuries. Breslau was beyond the range of Allied bombers and it survived intact until the dying days of the war (Hargreaves, 2013). With Russian troops moving through Poland, into eastern Germany, and advancing towards Berlin, Adolf Hitler made a decision that was to prove catastrophic for Breslau and its people. Hitler gave the orders for 'Festung Breslau' (Fortress Breslau) - Breslau was to 'hold the fort' - but Breslau was at the time no fort but rather a city of culture and learning with a university engaged with the world - even with Tasmania (Image 3).



Image 3: Thylacine (Tasmanian tiger, labelled 'Wilk workawaty') on display at the Museum of Natural History of Wrocław University (Uniwersytet Wrocławski).

A Breslau newspaper declared that:

What counts for us is the Führer's order to defend Festung Breslau to the last. We will carry out the mission of this German bulwark of culture on the Oder ... Warriors of Festung Breslau! We are fighting for a just cause. We believe in our victory and God will stand by our strong hearts (Schlesische Tageszeitung (1945) quoted in Hargreaves, 2013, p.120-1).

To create 'Festung Breslau' the homes and buildings of the city were progressively reduced to rubble by its own defenders, and the rubble was fashioned into improvised defences and barricades, even an airstrip. As the city was encircled by the Red Army, supplies were ferried in daily by

the Luftwaffe until finally, after nearly three months, the planes came no more. A battered and beaten Breslau capitulated on 6 May, 1945. Two days later Germany surrendered, and the European war was over. “The city [of Breslau] was a wasteland and 25,000 soldiers and civilians had died... and every German inhabitant [was] driven out of the city which became Wrocław in post-war Soviet occupied Poland” (Hargreaves, 2013, dj).

For the duration of the siege of Breslau, Koberwitz was beyond the ring of encirclement and appears to have been spared the onslaught. And the Breslau school, venue of Steiner’s karma course, also survived. The post-war restoration of Wrocław (pronounced ‘vrots-warff’) was the work of decades. In the sixties, the aftermath of Festung Breslau was still prominently visible with mounds of rubble in the streets and war-trashed buildings.



Image 4: An esplanade of Wrocław’s restored central market square (Rynek we Wrocławiu) displaying *European City of Culture 2016* flags.

Wrocław is now a vibrant, prosperous, Polish city, and well worth a visit. The streets of the historic precinct are once again a city that Rudolf Steiner would recognize - except for the bewildering sights and sounds of the Polish language, and the tracer lines of machine-gun pockmarks arching across the stone and brick facade of the university library and elsewhere. Wrocław was recently awarded the accolade of selection as the European Capital of Culture (Europejska stolica kultury) for 2016 (Image 4).

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