

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

*Statement by Demeter e.V., the Biodynamic Federation Demeter International e.V., the Forschungsring e.V. for Biodynamic Agriculture (Germany) and the Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum based on current scientific work.*

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

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

Positioning also requires transparency regarding one's own history. During the Nazi regime there were known connections in Germany between individuals involved with the early biodynamic movement, the Nazi regime, and the nationalist movement. Until recently there was no objective and contextualised knowledge about the exact nature of these connections and how strongly our predecessor organisations were involved.

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

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

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

Although the extensive work of the founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, contains a few statements which, from today's point of view, can clearly be classified as discriminatory, the entire work of Rudolf Steiner as a whole can by no means be classified as racist. This is the conclusion reached by a Dutch commission of enquiry<sup>1</sup>. It states: "Assumptions that racism is inherent in anthroposophy... have proven to be categorically incorrect". Instead, anthroposophical philosophy focuses on the potential and development of each individual human being, freedom and social responsibility, and the possibility for each person to be a citizen of the world.

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

A recent essay in cultural philosophy by Prof. Marcela da Veiga comes to the following conclusion: "At the centre of Rudolf Steiner's thinking are ideas that clearly contradict biologicistic and ethnically influenced concepts of identity. They describe the human being as a spiritual individuality that develops and emerges historically, leading to emancipation from biological and cultural constraints. The few existing ambivalences or instances of discriminations in Steiner's work are therefore to be seen and appropriately weighted in their relationship to his basic statements and intentions."<sup>5</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Marcelo da Veiga. Der ethische Universalismus und sein kulturgeschichtliches Dilemma. Ein philosophisch-kritischer Essay unter besonderer Berücksichtigung aktueller Kritik an der Anthroposophie Rudolf Steiners. CEST Edition, Bonn 2024.

Because of its individualistic and liberal nature, anthroposophy was classified by the Nazi regime as incompatible with National Socialist ideas. The predecessor organisations of today's associations, the "Reichsverband für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise in Landwirtschaft und Gartenbau" (Biodynamic Agriculture Association) and the "Versuchsring für Biodynamische Wirtschaftsweise" (Experimental Circle for Biodynamics), were ultimately banned, as were all other anthroposophical organisations. Nevertheless, anthroposophical ideas also had some followers among leading National Socialists. Thereby attempts were however made to detach the agricultural concept from its anthroposophical basis. Instead, elements of biodynamic agriculture were taken up in National Socialist approaches, such as the "lebensgesetzlichen Landwirtschaft" (agriculture based on the law of life), and even practiced in some concentration camps under the leadership of the SS.

As was already known through several studies, there were personalities in the biodynamic movement who were in regular contact with National Socialists up to the highest levels of the hierarchy, vegetable gardens in concentration camps were cultivated biodynamically, and the biodynamic journal "Demeter" dedicated a whole page to the "Führer" 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1939. Whether this was done out of conviction or to secure the burgeoning biodynamic economy was a question for us. Other questions were, for example: How did members of the biodynamic movement relate to the regime and its ideology? Were they followers, collaborators or resisters? Were there lobbyists who tried to save what they had built? Or even convinced accomplices?

Demeter e.V., the Forschungsring e.V., the Biodynamic Federation Demeter International e.V., the Forschungsring, and the Goetheanum - Section for Agriculture wanted to establish transparency in this regard to face their historical responsibility and be able to speak about it. To this end, a socio-historical research project was commissioned to independently investigate these questions according to scientific standards. The three-member team, with a distinguished professional profile, was supported by an advisory board of specialist scientists with relevant expertise. The results were presented and discussed publicly at the Topography of Terror Foundation around the summer of 2024 and have been published in book form.<sup>6</sup>

The study, which was conducted between 2020 and 2024, used a wide range of sources to identify an extremely large amount of material on around 2,000 individuals associated with the biodynamic movement. Among other things, they examined more than 10,000 pages from the Nazi surveillance apparatus, as well as documents from more than 30 other archives and estates, and interviewed descendants. The authors asked about ideological overlaps and forms of collaboration, but also addressed "serious differences between the biodynamic and Nazi movements, as well as the diverse forms of resistance by followers and functionaries," as Prof. Daniela Münkler writes in the introduction. "This book further objectifies the previous very polarized, sometimes also emotionalized debate on the topic, and new, source-saturated insights are introduced into the discussion."

The study traces how the members of the biodynamic associations decided as early as the summer of 1933 to integrate into the Nazi state – the alternative would have been to disband. During the Nazi dictatorship, the biodynamic movement was initially able to grow until it was dissolved by the Gestapo in the summer of 1941. After that, however, some biodynamic

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<sup>6</sup> J. Ebert / M. Pieschel / S. zur Nieden: Die biodynamische Bewegung und demeter in der NS-Zeit. Akteure. Verbindungen. Haltungen. Metropol Verlag, Berlin 2024.

specialists were recruited by the SS for their cultivation institutions – for example, to work in the Dachau concentration camp.

With the founding of the “Biodynamic Reich Association” in 1933, the stakeholders accepted the new conditions, dutifully introduced the “Führersprinciple” and excluded the few Jewish members. The protection of Deputy Leader Rudolf Hess, a supporter of biodynamic farming, led to institutional links with the Nazi state from 1934 onwards, without which organized biodynamic agriculture would probably not have been possible. This cooperation ended with the ban of the Biodynamic Reich Association in 1941. However, SS-Reichsführer Himmler recruited six biodynamic specialists from the SS to work on biodynamic horticultural experiments in Dachau concentration camp and two other concentration camps. A case of collaboration. After 1945, the gardener Franz Lippert was the only one to face a denazification trial and, like most Germans, was exonerated, according to the study.

Although the biodynamic and Nazi movements emerged at the same time and shared similar views of the reform movement, such as criticism of the increasing rationalization of life, which was typical of the times, but as the study shows, the approaches of both movements were very different: “We were also surprised that our text analysis of biodynamic writings, even in those texts that were explicitly addressed to Nazi authorities after 1933, did not contain any approval of the central Nazi ideologemes – antisemitism, racism, nationalism, imperialism and the annihilation of ‘unworthy’ life,” the researchers concluded.

### **3. Positioning the biodynamic movement and its organisations today**

As the conceptual descendants of the biodynamic protagonists of that time, we take our responsibility seriously and distance ourselves from the active collaboration of some biodynamic actors, especially from their involvement in the agricultural institutions of the SS in concentration camps. We also condemn the attempted ingratiation with leading figures of the Nazi system and the exclusion of Jewish members from the Biodynamic Reich Association.

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

The opposite of racism is inherent in anthroposophy. The current statutes of the Biodynamic Federation Demeter International explicitly distance themselves from right-wing extremism and racism. As a worldwide movement active in a wide variety of cultures and religions, we firmly oppose extremist and exclusionary thoughts or practices – in line with the humanistic development claim of its foundation, anthroposophy.

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

the individuality of the human being, and is reflected in the core values of the associations and the Agricultural Section, which include not only sustainability but also freedom, equality, solidarity and wholeness.

To be able to achieve and live these values truthfully, we understand history as an archive of learning. We see the commissioned study as an important step to bring light on the history of our organisations and to learn from history for our future work. We communicate the results within our movement, and also train employees on how to deal with extremism. Especially today, when right-wing extremists are trying to gain social acceptance through their commitment to nature conservation and organic farming, it is more important than ever for organic farming associations to clearly distinguish themselves from these groups.

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