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Peace Leaflets A Starting point for Dialogue

THE PURPOSE OF PEACE LEAFLETS

Part of the mission of a peace museum is to invite dialogue. Recent acts of violence carried out by chaotic elements of the extreme right make us pose difficult questions. How was this possible? What was overlooked? Where must leverage be applied in order to prevent further escalation? Can the problem be solved by stricter laws? Is it enough to eliminate the ringleaders through long prison terms? How can the younger generation be made aware of the values of a democratic way of life?

It is now clear that we are facing a challenge in peace education. But upon whose shoulders should this responsibility fall? Certainly not on teachers alone! Considering our present situation, and I am not only thinking of Austria, I believe all well-meaning and concerned persons should become "peace educators."

Ideally, peace work should begin in kindergartens and schools, in extracurricular clubs and activities, in peace museums and in the still to be founded environmental and peace academies (1). Turning to the subject of schools, let me quote Professor Erwin Ringel (2), who writes: "We failed to create in the young generation a spirit which would make it comprehend the situation of the past. We did not succeed in communicating what we learned from the lessons of our time. It did not happen in homes or in schools, except occasionally--certainly too little. Young people lack information. In reality they don't know anything!"

I have many years of experience as a teacher and I wonder if knowledge alone is sufficient in effecting necessary change. I believe that peace begins with dialogue, which requires courage, understanding and encouragement. Schools should make it their mission to foster open dialogue. If students are never asked things like "What do you think?" they will never believe that their opinion counts, and a big opportunity for peace education will have been lost.

To provoke discussion along these lines requires commitment and creativity. Possibly, many a teacher will look askance at the idea of such an effort, perhaps they may even see it as a rather abstract burden. From my personal experience as a teacher (3), I know that I have been able to really engage my students whenever I talk about myself, relating stories of my life, key moments, mistakes—and the conclusions I have drawn. The investigations of the education psychologist, Reinhard Tausch (4) reveal that in Germany, up to ninety five percents of all instruction takes the form of direct lecturing. The idea that students spend 95 percent of their time at school in such passive activity, points towards a great deficit in education.

ERSTES ÖSTERREICHISCHES FRIEDENSMUSEUM FIRST AUSTRIAN PEACE MUSEUM



Among my mainly unpublished literary efforts is a collection of peace leaflets and autobiographical sketches. I have also written twenty five fictitious letters to a young friend of the Nazi era, these are all available for publication. The peace leaflets (about a hundred or so still in need of editing) vary in length, from one to two typewritten pages. These could be distributed before a round of discussions in order to provide a starting point for dialogue.

When asking the question "Where does it start?" which is a task we have set for ourselves here at the First Austrian Peace Museum, we come up with many answers. History plays a big role in these of course, but if we pursue things further, we won't be content with the questionable wisdom of sayings like "Si vis pacem para bellum" (if you want peace, prepare for war), or "War is but a natural law." Then we will continue to search and to prepare for peace.

- 1) See "Future Perspectives of Peace Museums", published. in Peace forum 94/2, Austria, Center of Studies, Schläining
- 2) Ringel, "Fear the Neighbour as Yourself", Elephant Verlag 1991, page 93/94
- 3) F. Deutsch, Education and Instruction 4/87
- 4) R. Tausch, Psychology of Education