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Peace Leaflets A Starting point for Dialogue

WOLFSEGG CASE STUDY: AN IMAGINED INTERVIEW

I (Interviewer): Being the founder of the First Austrian Peace Museum, how can you explain the lack of cooperation between the municipal councillors of Wolfsegg, which resulted in new elections even before the end of their mandate?

D (Franz Deutsch): The sources of conflict sometimes can be traced to the past, the time between World War I and World War II certainly had great repercussions on the coal mining district of Wolfsegg, but the roots of the conflict may be found in an even more distant period.

I: Let us stick to the interim period. What is the connection with the present escalation of the conflict in the municipal council?

D: During a discussion round a life-long Wolfsegg resident had this to say: "You will never get rid of the class consciousness of the people of Wolfsegg. None of the surrounding municipalities have such a pronounced distinction between the labourers, the middle class and the peasants. This 'caste' thinking may have originated in the bad times before World War I.

I: What, in your opinion, has triggered such an escalation?

D: I hope you don't expect me to get personal and put the blame on individuals. I think I am on reasonably good terms with the representatives of all political parties and I want to keep it that way. Even in Wolfsegg there are municipal councillors of every political stripe, who place collective well-being above personal or political feuds. I consider them the pillars of cooperation. They will ensure a brilliant future for Wolfsegg.

I: You seem to be an admirer of Wolfsegg. Were you born here?

D: No, I am not a native born, although I have spent almost thirty years as a teacher here. I understand your question. Perhaps you think an outsider may not be qualified to judge local issues. On the other hand, he may not be hampered by certain blind spots.

I: You are not native-born, then. How do you assess the problem yourself?



D: There is a graffito on the wall of a house in Kohlgrube (a part of Wolfsegg) that says: "The wheel of time is turning and turning". I sometimes wonder if anybody understands what this means.

I: When you say that, do you mean that a kind of thoughtlessness could impede the resolution of these issues?

D: I am afraid so. Let us consider the time between the World Wars with its untold misery and its extreme social injustices. Masters and servants! Given my personal sympathy for the disadvantaged, the helpless and the humiliated, I am sure I would have marched with the unions and Social Democrats at that time. But what about today? Does it make sense to demonstrate with blank banners?

I: Do you mean that all problems have been solved and everything is fine?

D: Not at all! Certainly the social safety net needs to be tightened here and there, and cases of hardship have to be addressed. But we must also admit that most Austrians have never been better off than today. There is no need, therefore, to take an obstructionist stance, even toward democracy itself. We should try to strengthen democracy as a stepping stone to a higher form of social development. This ought to be a goal worthy of our best efforts.

I: What is your greatest wish for the future?

D: May I quote Lorin Maazel, who answered this question before a worldwide television audience at the Vienna New Year's Concert: "... that we do not surrender this world of ours to the fanatics any more".