

## **Franz Deutsch (1929-2009)**

### **Inspiring founder-director of the First Austrian Peace Museum**

It is with great sadness that we have learnt of the death of Franz Deutsch on 18th November 2009 as a result of a heart-attack while on holiday in the Red Sea resort of Ras Mohamad in Egypt. In 1993 he opened a peace museum in the small market town of Wolfsegg, not far from Salzburg, and during the next sixteen years, up to the time of his death, he was its dynamic and inspiring director. From the beginning he was also an enthusiastic supporter of the international network of peace museums, having participated in the first conference in 1992 and several of the following ones. Participants will remember him as a passionate peace educator whose kindness and warm-heartedness endeared him to many.

Given his background and educational philosophy, it was appropriate that the museum was housed in a building which had previously been used as a primary school: Franz had been a schoolteacher and was particularly keen to help young people how to think about social issues, especially war and violence. It was in Wolfsegg that the Peasants War in Upper Austria came to an end in 1626. The proximity of an old battlefield (where the peasants were brutally slaughtered and defeated) gave him an opportunity to confront museum visitors with the central question, 'Where does war begin?' The answer was not to be found outside, on the battlefield, but inside, in the human mind. He was fond of referring to the phrase in the preamble of the UNESCO constitution, 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.' The visual representation of this idea became the logo of the museum. Designed by Hans Schenk, a local artist and friend, it depicted the profile of a human head in the shape of a Moebius ring in which nestled a dove carrying an olive branch. With the artist's approval, Franz offered the same logo to the international network (which would take many years before finally deciding on a different logo).

The peace museum in Wolfsegg was his courageous and imaginative creation for the effective promotion of peace education and for the building up of the 'defences of peace'. Franz saw peace museums as public places which functioned as centres for peace education and for the fostering of a culture of peace. Here, the public, and especially the younger generation, could deepen their understanding of the causes of war and violence and engage in dialogue about ways and means to overcome them. In order to stimulate debate he produced well over 100 'peace leaflets' which related to individual exhibits or thematic issues in the museum. He wanted to see them distributed as widely as possible so that the museum also had, as it were, a 'travelling' component.

He also regarded peace museums as the natural home of peace-loving people, and envisaged a global network of peace museums which would eventually unite millions across the world and who would thereby become a significant force for peace. His ideas and hopes in this respect are clearly outlined in a 'Manifesto for the Founding of Peace Museums' that he included in the beautiful, richly illustrated 60-page bilingual (German-English) booklet that served as a guide/catalogue to the museum. His great support for the development of a worldwide network of peace museums is further evidenced by the fact that following its creation he requested Hans Schenk to design possible logos for the network, some of which are reproduced in the catalogue. Franz deeply believed that the 'dream of world peace' would become reality and argued, quoting Henry David Thoreau, that we can dream about castles in the air, but that at the same time we had to work hard to provide foundations for them. The latter were to be sought, first and foremost, in the realm of education. Education was able to uncover the motives and driving forces of war, show the cost and futility of war, and suggest alternatives. He was fond of quoting Peter Rosegger, the Austrian poet who was also one of Bertha von Suttner's most fervent supporters: 'What will be stronger than war? The belief in peace! We must have this belief in the possibility of lasting world peace and spread it throughout the world - this will accomplish a lot. I am firmly convinced that people will find peace if they search for it'.

'Founder of the First Austrian Peace Museum' is a claim of which he could justifiably be proud, and which he earned through dedication, persistence, and the constant support of Trudi, his wife of many years. In order for the museum to come about he had to overcome countless obstacles. He encountered a great deal of ignorance and indifference, and when the museum was eventually established, he said it 'stood like a rock in a sea of misunderstanding'. Its creator

belonged to that generation which had experienced the Second World War, in his case, as a young teenager who lost many of his family members when his local town was destroyed by bombing. This was the deeper origins of his passion for peace; only after his retirement was he able to devote himself fully to peace education and particularly the establishment and running of a peace museum. Following the Second World War, the same experience, passion, and hope also inspired other individuals, notably in Germany and Japan, to create peace museums. Because they owe so much to the vision and commitment (including financial) of the founder, the future of such museums can be precarious once their creator has passed away. We must hope that the First Austrian Peace Museum will survive the death of its founder and will be able to continue his devoted work for peace. In any case, we salute a foremost peace educator who, in a small and picturesque corner of his country, was successful in turning his dream into reality.  
Peter van den Dungen

2nd January 2010