Chapter 5

Anthroposophy in Denmark

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The Founding Years

In April 1908, during a lecturing tour in Scandinavia, Rudolf Steiner paid his first visit to Denmark. As general secretary of the German Section of the Theosophical Society (TS) and a well known articulator of Theosophical thoughts and ideas, Steiner’s visit garnered considerable attention from numerous members. From then and until December 1912, when Steiner left the TS and subsequently founded the Anthroposophical Society (AS), he visited Denmark on a yearly basis. Following his visit in January 1910, a Theosophical lodge primarily focusing on Steiner’s work and ideas was founded in Copenhagen and given the name Steinerlogen. Establishing lodges that primarily followed a particular source of inspiration or impulses provided by a particular Theosophical leader was at the time not unique to Steinerlogen. In Denmark there were already several such lodges, transparently named HPB-logen, Olcott-rogen, Besant-rogen and – later on – Leadbeater-rogen. Steinerlogen, however, presented a somewhat different case, since it apparently was formed by three members of the TS, Bernhard Løw, Caroline Kühle, and Henry Riis-Magnussen, who had been excluded by the local Theosophical Society in Copenhagen in March 1909. Although critique of the leadership seems to have been a major issue behind the exclusion, these members’ interest in Steiner’s work was a contributing factor (Borgman Hansen 2004). On 17 January 1910 Steiner visited the Swedish city of Lund, and a group of between twenty and thirty Danes inspired by his message went to see and talk to him. Steiner advised them to form a separate lodge, and the group returned to Denmark eager to do so. On 29 January, less than two weeks later, a constituting meeting was held, and on 3 March 1910 the first general assembly took place, at which the first Steiner-based organisation in Denmark was formally founded. Although still a lodge associated with the TS, Steiner’s initial visit in 1908 and the launching of Steinerlogen are seen by the AS as key foundational events for the dissemination of Anthroposophy in Denmark.

When Steiner left the TS in the last days of 1912 and founded the AS, these events impacted developments in Denmark, as well. Apart from Steinerlogen, another relatively small lodge located in Vejle on Jutland left the TS in March.
In terms of membership, this meant that more than one-fifth of the members of the TS left and joined the AS (or in absolute numbers, approximately sixty members out of 300, as documented in the protocol from the annual meeting of the TS Denmark in 1913). In contrast to the situation in neighbouring Scandinavian countries when lodges left the TS, the Danish “split” caused disputes over the division of assets and property. Løw and others argued that the assets of the now dissolved Theosophical Steinerlogen could be transferred to a new lodge operating autonomously but within an Anthroposophical context. According to the TS, any property held by a dissolved lodge should be returned to the TS. Eventually, TS and Steinerlogen seem to have reached an agreement, but other disputes over ownership followed. In January 1914 when a member of Steinerlogen, H.P. Rasmussen, passed away leaving an inheritance of 60,000 Danish crowns to the lodge, conflicts over how to manage these funds emerged among the leadership of the lodge. Negotiations proved unsuccessful, and Løw and a group of followers left Steinerlogen and founded a new lodge, Johannesgruppen. After this schism, another six years passed until a further lodge was founded in Denmark (1920), Eremogruppen, under the leadership of Carl Wallen and his wife Soffy Wallen.

As in other countries, Anthroposophical lodges or groups had until then been organised as autonomous bodies. In 1923 this changed, when the international leadership of the AS decided to implement a new and more centralised organisational structure that was intended to unify and strengthen Anthroposophical work and initiatives across borders. In Denmark this new structure would have had the effect of uniting all Danish AS lodges in one common organisation. However, not all Steiner-inspired lodges approved of this new centralising development. Due to disagreements between Løw and other prominent Danish Anthroposophists, another two and a half decades passed before Johannesgruppen joined the Danish AS.

The first Danish general secretary who was elected after the unification of the Danish national section in 1923 was Johannes Hohlenberg (1881–1960). Hohlenberg was a writer on diverse subjects including yoga and the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, and an artist of considerable reputation, and was therefore well-known also outside the AS milieu in Denmark. The general secretary that followed, Esper Eising (1876–1951), who took over after Hohlenberg in 1931 and held the position until 1943, was a successful businessman and chairman in several national business councils and therefore, like his predecessor, also a prominent figure outside of the AS. Having respected figures as general secretaries had a positive impact on the work of AS during these years – especially Eising’s experience in organisational matters helped structuring the initiatives of the Danish section. Despite the ongoing conflicts between the