

20 Years Ecoropa

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" A Tribute to ECOROPA's Founders"

by
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DENIS DE ROUGEMONT

What an outstanding person from his very beginning! Born in a Swiss mountain village near Neuchâtel, biochemist at 14, a poet with 18, publishing his first article with 17, and with 22 his first book "The Misdeeds of Public Education" (to which he was exposed from elementary school to a doctorate in literature at the University of Neuchâtel). But neither school nor any other institution could tame his rebellious spirits. In his mid-twenties he is founding a monthly 'Esprit' and becoming a mover of the non-conformist French intellectuals of the 'stormy Thirties'.

The outbreak of World War II means mobilization for the Swiss Army. Denis is co-founder of the "Ligue de Gotthard", committed to resist Hitler in case of an German attack on Switzerland. 1940 Hitler enters Paris. Lieutenant Denis writes a mournful article - rather unfriendly to Hitler - for the Gazette de Lausanne. That is too much for the Chief of the Swiss army. It could be considered as a breach of neutrality and provoke German repression. After two weeks of confinement Denis is shoved over to the United States where he is to stay for six long years. But this could not convert him to the religion of 'God's own country', the first commandment being 'Make Dollars'. He writes a book "The Heart of Europe: Switzerland", hardly concealing that his heart was in Europe all the time. And after his return, as speaker at 'Rencontres International', here in Geneva - his title: "Les Maladies de l'Europe" followed 40 years of untiring political, cultural, philosophical struggle for a United Europe, entirely different in character and concept from the EU of today, which embodies everything dear to the establishment - and the multinational corporations, as the true masters behind the scene he is loathing. Along with this are the endeavors to become a super-power, armed to the teeth with atomic weapons, competing with the US and Japan in dominating if needed, with military force the globe.

In one of his most important books - "L'Avenir est notre Affaire", Denis is inciting men and women to independence in interdependence, in thought and action: not to accept as fate, that which is only serving the vested interests of the few in command. The three pillars of his thinking and feeling: Federation, that is cooperation by free will and consensus without sacrificing the precious values of diversity, in order to master the tasks which cannot be left to individuals or small communities. Freedom and responsibility: the two are inseparable! Without them democracy can never survive.

And finally, compassion for all those in stress and need - the great majority of the world's population. That includes global responsibility for the natural patrimony, meaning also to stop the senseless waste, stop the kind of parasitical way of life of our industrial society.

In one sentence: Denis asked for a profound change, for a great U-Turn as our friend Edward Goldsmith called it. Creating and directing until his death the Centre Europeen de la Culture, to which he devoted so much intellectual and physical efforts, he nevertheless was convinced that Ecology in the full meaning of the word was a precondition for the survival not only of our civilization, but for all forms of higher life on earth. From the very

beginning of ECOROPA, Nanik - a convinced ecologist - was at his side in common efforts for our cause. Let us at this occasion - as she is fortunately with us - thank her from all our heart. Could ECOROPA have found a better president as the one who founded our group? Therefore, 20 years later, cheers to him, cheers to his soul, somewhere in the world behind our world.

EDOUARD KRESSMANN

died a few months before Denis at the age of 78. He discovered ecology via his profession as wine merchant and expert. Only at first sight does this appear quite astonishing: studying culture and wine he found out that good quality depended on a deep understanding of the links between soil, plant and climate. He wrote prose about the influence of wine on culture in an admirably poetic convincing way. When he saw that modern technology of agriculture - agrobusiness - destroyed the foundations of healthy plant and fruit cultivation, he retired as grandfather from business, joined Denis, became a co-founder of ECOROPA, a dedicated crusader for peace, a courageous defender of nature. He published the ECOROPA BULLETIN - appearing in French and English - with much information on the ecological movement in Europe and overseas, acted as Secretary General, was host of many ECOROPA meetings and was a most important element in binding us together. His contributions to ECOROPA-MANIFESTOS and campaigns (e.g. against atomic energy) were excellent. We miss him dearly and will always remember him in love and friendship.

MANFRED SIEBKER

a leading physicist and engineer of EURATOM, came from the other side of the fence: Knowing too much about the deadly threat of this technology - as a Damocles sword over our heads -, witnessing the ignorance, arrogance and irresponsibility of its supporters, made him for us an invaluable source of scientific and technical information. He was the leading author, together with contributions of some of our friends, of the "Ecological Manifesto for a different Europe" - 1979! - with a wide distribution in Western Europe before the first European elections, an excellent document containing all the problems, haunting us still 17 years later.

He died from apoplexy after a long suffering. Another pillar of our intellectual capital was lost.

BERNARD CHARBONNEAU

died in April this year at the age of 85. Already in 1937 the first "reflexio ecologique" ever published in France, was his manifesto "le sentiment de la nature, force revolutionnaire". After World War II he joined Jacques Ellul, professor at the University of Bordeaux in order to create a movement of ecological thinking. Both had to fight the resistance of the scientific community. While Ellul chose to collaborate with American universities, Bernard retired to the solitude of the Pyrenean mountains to write and meditate. Several of his numerous books were published in 1973, among others "The System and the Chaos".

JACQUES ELLUL

the philosopher, has also been a brother and sister soul. As a commentary to our ECOROPA-Documents, he wrote a thoughtful examination of the need for a new European Culture. The ecological movement should from the beginning be its pioneer. (That was in 1986.) He is convinced, that the so-called male values are at the origin, leading us to the abyss, and that the female values - respect of life, attraction by the small, support for the weak, mutual confidence, etc. may permit us to stop the race to oblivion.

Still the chance to choose...

Let me close this very sketchy paying of tribute to some 'comrades in arms' in our endeavour to save Europe from the nightmare prepared by those in power. That they could look such a long distance ahead is a hopeful signal.

Our species is still one of all possibilities and we still have the chance to choose...