

Study of racist attitudes among Waldorf school pupils Waldorf schools show extremely low animosity towards foreigners

The works of Rudolf Steiner have been repeatedly pilloried for supposedly containing racist statements or comments. This has in turn then lent support to the supposition that Waldorf schools in general tend to harbour a xenophobic atmosphere, as expressed in the spring of 2006 for example on the German television channels ZDF and 3sat. A new empirical study by Christian Pfeiffer of Lower Saxony's Criminological Research Institute states that in fact the exact opposite is true.

According to the study led by Christian Pfeiffer, Professor of Criminology, pupils at Waldorf schools exhibit the lowest levels of both xenophobia and right-wing extremism. At Hauptschulen (the lowest tier of the German three-tiered school system), 24.7% of pupils harbour xenophobic and 9.5% right-wing tendencies. This drops to 8.3% and 1.9% respectively at Gymnasiums (the highest tier school, the equivalent of grammar schools). But only 2.8% of Waldorf pupils can be considered to have xenophobic and 1.2% right-wing attitudes. This evaluation is based on information obtained from 9,001 youngsters attending the 9th year at schools in Germany.

According to these figures, Hauptschule pupils show three times more xenophobia than Gymnasium pupils, and Gymnasium pupils three times more than Waldorf pupils. This clearly very low figure is especially striking when seen in conjunction with the fact that in some other categories (e.g. graffiti-spraying, shop-lifting and truancy) the study shows Waldorf pupils to be level-pegging with Hauptschule pupils and way above Gymnasium pupils.

The results regarding 'macho' attitudes are even more striking, with Waldorf pupils scoring an extremely low rating: Only 0.3% of ninth-year pupils agreed with statements such as 'A man who is not prepared to react to insults with violence is a weakling', or 'If a woman cheats on her husband it is o.k. for him to beat her'. For Gymnasium pupils the figure was almost seven times higher (2.0%), and for Hauptschule pupils compared with Gymnasium pupils 'only' a bit over four times more (8.7%).

Especially in categories where derogatory stereotyping is most frequent (i.e. against women and against foreigners), this shows the attitudes of Waldorf pupils to be a great deal more up to date than those of their fellow pupils elsewhere. This in turn corresponds with the attitude expressed by Steiner in his written works, especially his description of the human being in the final chapter 'Individuality and Genus' of his main work *The Philosophy of Freedom*:

"If we seek in the generic laws the reasons for an expression of this being, we seek in vain. We are concerned with something purely individual which can be explained only in terms of itself. If a human being has achieved this emancipation from all that is generic, and we are nevertheless determined to explain everything about him in generic terms, then we have no sense for what is individual. It is impossible to understand a human being completely if one takes the concept of genus as the basis of one's judgement." (Trs. M. Wilson)

Translated from German by J. Collis, MCIL