

## Editorial

**Axel Föllner-Mancini**

The year 2013 is drawing to a close. Along with the usual flood of talking points, crises and more or less significant changes, it brought us the public disclosures about the whole-scale spying some western governments have been engaged in. The whistle-blower was Edward Snowden, whose declared mission was to make the world's societies – both democratic and otherwise – aware that the interests of power can take on a form that undermines the individual rights of free citizens, and to show how this can creep up on them. The virtually unlimited surveillance of private individuals, social groups, companies and other institutions (including, of course, those involved in research), is made possible by digitalised information technology that has re-structured the world. Hardly anyone these days can afford not to be plugged into some digital network. Apparently, to be on-line is to be alive. It is like water to the thirsty. But what do we do if the spring is poisoned?

The technical capability we are talking about here would serve very well as the master key of totalitarian thinking in its early stages. It could unlock the door to everything that might be of use or interest to those seeking to increase their power.

Snowden's disclosures have demonstrated this in detail. His documents have provided clear evidence that such intentions exist, as do the technical means to carry them out.

But these revelations have also fostered a discussion about safeguards for genuine democracy. These take shape in an inter-personal sphere, built of both privacy and trust. Where this has been hollowed out by control and surveillance any kind of authentic life is no longer possible. Lenin's all-pervasive political dictum "trust is good, control is better" directly impeded the growth of a civil society in the former Soviet Union. The after-effects are still detectable today. For the west these words of Lenin have long been synonymous with dictatorship.

Today *our* civil society stands before the question of whether it will sacrifice its most cherished values to the Western variant of the control dictatorship, or whether it wishes to preserve them. Its decision has far-reaching consequences – and not only for itself. An amputated democracy would forfeit its role as an example for other societies.

*RoSE: Research on Steiner Education* is an international on-line journal, an independent organ of intellectual dialogue. It was begun in the knowledge and confidence that nowhere can spiritual productivity flourish as well as within the security of genuine democratic structures.

That this may continue, it is worth bearing all this in mind, particularly at the present time.

Having thus sketched the current context, I hope you will find our new edition a stimulating read.