

The Institutional Establishment of Buddhism in Germany by the “Buddhistischer Missionsvere in fuer Deutschland / BMVfD(Sitz Leipzig)” in 1903 with regard to the importance of its Lankan ties

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On August 15th 1903 Dr. Karl Seidenstuecker founded in Leipzig the first Buddhist community of Europe. This small group remained rather fragile since its birth had not been welcomed by others. Especially the Protestant Church, which was dominating religious life in Leipzig, attacked this small circle, as its general-secretary, Seidenstuecker, being the son of a Lutheran superintendent had attacked christianity, fiercely (writing anonymously “The Atrocities of ‘Christian’ Civilization”). Not being surprised at attacks from this side the BMVfD struggled severely to free itself from the influences of the German theosophical movement which had transferred its headquarters in 1898 to Leipzig. The problem of ‘true and false Buddhism’ was in this quarrel a rather important one. Seidenstuecker, being an Indologist, attacked the Blavatsky concept as well as Olcott’s concept very heavily (despite having translated Olcott’s >Buddhist Catechism< into German). Since the theosophists proved to be stronger than the Buddhists, the latter suffered setbacks. They collapsed soon but came back as “Buddhistische Gesellschaft in Deutschland” (1906), which founded the “Buddhistische Central-Bibliothek”, das “MahabodhiZentrum” (1907), the “Mahabodhi-Centrale – Buddhistisches Lehr- und Missionsinstitut” (1909), and the “Deutsche Zweig der Mahabodhi-Gesellschaft (DZMG)” (1911) with Seidenstuecker as secretary. All these Leipzig based communities were in bitter dispute with other emerging German Buddhist institutions, such as f.i. the “Deutsche Pali-Gesellschaft” (1909), that favoured a non-dharmapalic Theravada and the Halle based “Bund fuer buddhistisches Leben ” (1912).

The German éxilé to New York C.T. Strauss, who became the first ‘white Buddhist’ during the Worldparliament of Religions in Chicago, promoted the case of the DZMG considerably since he maintained close ties to Dharmapala and settled in Leipzig in 1909. Taking part in the temperance campaigns of the Anagarika (f.i. in 1912) he regularly visited Ceylon. On June 12th 1912 Justice of Peace, D. A. de Silva - through the help of M. Nanissara and Dharmapala – empowered the Leipzig DZMG to speak on behalf of the MBS. By this act the ‘putsch’ of the rival factions - and the theosophical claims to interpret Buddhism – was defeated. The Anagarika type of Buddhism gained the upper hand in Germany – for a couple of years – of other Buddhist tendencies, as well as theosophic, esoteric and occult ones. Since Leipzig, in those days, was the media centre of Germany, where the main Buddhist periodicals were edited, this was an important event for the Buddhist business in Germany.

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