

28. October 2005

## Living the Christmas Conference/ Gelebte Weihnachtstagung

### Society for the Preservation of the General Anthroposophical Society of 1923 and 1925

Greetings to all of you interested in the anthroposophical news this society specializes in. Today I am summarizing some articles in the current (German-language) newsletter – Fall, 2005. Some of this material is available in English on 888GOYA.org. For a free trial copy, or to subscribe to the newsletter *Gelebte Weihnachtstagung*, write to Gelebte Weihnachtstagung, CH-8810 Horgen, Bockenweg 31, Switzerland, or email [administration@888GOYA.org](mailto:administration@888GOYA.org).

I will assume that you remember the Vorstand's recent reconstitution plans based on an untrue view of Society history, which two court judgments blocked, after a two-year legal battle. If you need refreshing, I will send the material to you again.

The last news I sent was a short report of the disturbing March 19, 2005 members' meeting in Dornach. At that meeting, Vorstand members announced that they would not appeal the second court judgment against them, handed down by the Solothurn Court on January 12, 2005. They accepted the judgment – theoretically. Yet at the same time, in effect, they did not accept it, because Paul Mackay presented it in a totally perverted way! Like the Dorneck-Thierstein Court in 2004, the Solothurn Court had ruled that, contrary to the Vorstand's claim, the Christmas Conference society **lives on completely, is fully contained, in our present society**. Paul Mackay, however, said that unfortunately, the court had proved **that the Christmas Conference society does not survive**. Those conscientious members who try to make the affairs of the Society their own, and had read at least the key parts of the judgments, saw the discrepancy and were deeply disturbed. This perversion of the judgment does not augur well for the future of the Society. Note: Both of these judgments are available in full on 888.GOYA.org, in German. The first is also available in English.

While all Anthroposophists are relieved that the legal contests are over, there are indications that just because the court will not allow the Vorstand to dissolve our present society or "reactivate" a nonexistent, second society, Vorstand members still continue to move ahead in some of the same disturbing, pre-lawsuit directions. I will sketch out what the open-minded observe:

## The Members' Right to Present Free Motions

Article 10 of the original statutes, given the Society by Rudolf Steiner in 1923 and now called "Principles", states simply, "*Motions proposed by individual members or groups of members shall be submitted one week before the General Meeting.* There is no restriction on the subject of the motion. It can be any subject close to the member's heart. At the December 2002 General Members Meeting, however, one of the changes made to the Principles, (to many, the most disturbing change) was, "Member motions can only refer to the published agenda." This change would put the Vorstand **in sole control** of what is seriously discussed **and voted on** at meetings. Members could still bring up concerns, but these, unlike motions, need not be voted on, and **do not lead to binding action**. And even time for any kind of discussion has been minimized on the agendas of members' meetings for years now.

This change of Article 10, along with other changes made at the December 2002 meeting became invalid when the court established that the society for which the altered Principles were intended did not exist. **However, the right to present free motions is still being taken away.** An example: At the General Members' Meeting of 2005, soon after the second court ruling, quite a few motions were sent in, **in timely fashion**. Obviously, important issues pertaining to that ruling were (and should have been) on members' minds. But the official agenda stated that there had been **no motions** sent in on time, and that, anyway, there were none that were related to the agenda, (this is not even a requirement in the Principles)! The members' concerns were not heard, let alone discussed or voted on, and the Vorstand had achieved its apparent desire – to be able to run through its agenda without member "interference".

What were some of the motions that were not heard? Some were critical, to be sure, but it is well known that difficult matters swept under the rug become even more difficult. Members asked for clarity on how the legal costs were to be paid, and asked that only those who supported a second appeal should pay for it; they asked for a special meeting at which to determine how the Society should move ahead after legal action was over. They asked not to have the meeting split into two parts and held under two different society names ( the General Anthroposophical Society and the Anthroposophical Society), a procedure practiced for some time and never explained or voted on. Another motion requested that the entire (not excessively long) court document be read aloud slowly and clearly at a members' meeting, a request so basic it seems self-evident. By and large, members were only asking for more opportunity to inform themselves, to come to an understanding of issues -- essential in our *Erkenntnisgesellschaft*, where all decisions are to be based on insight -- and to express their views and vote, again essential in the democratic, open society Rudolf Steiner envisioned. (cf. Christmas Conference and *Letters to Members*).

This outcome saddened, but did not surprise, alert members, because it continues a trend of several years. At the Easter, 2004, Members Meeting I myself experienced a similar suppression of members' motions. The motions disposed of unheard, and a discussion period in progress, I heard Vorstand members and a few Society members each "speak their pieces" -- but there was never a meaningful exchange on what had been said. The Society has thus been gradually split **into the administration**, which goes

ahead without explaining itself or giving members much of a voice, and **into a largely passive membership**, which allows itself to be led without trying to understand what is going on. Those who yearn to understand and be responsible members with a real voice have been marginalized and labeled “agitators” or “troublemakers”, who only get in the way of the agenda, an attitude that has unfortunately spread to most attending members. Getting through the agenda smoothly and quickly has thus become an end in itself. Yet Rudolf Steiner said, “**In mutual give and take** in spiritual matters, human life unfolds its truest essence.” (*Letter to Members, 1/113/24*).

## **New Trends in the Leadership of National Societies**

On December 5, 2004, *Anthroposophie weltweit* published a new set of rules/procedures for general secretaries and representatives of national societies (*Geschäftsordnung für Generalsekretäre und Landesvertreter*), which they apparently decided on among themselves, along with the Vorstand, which was present at their meeting. However, these turn out to have a deep effect on how national societies are conducted, and hence on members, also. Rudolf Steiner said the general secretaries’ main tasks are “to represent the national society to their members and, second, to **represent their own national societies** [their constituents] **in Dornach.**” (November 18, 1923 lecture, held when the Dutch society was founded).

General secretaries, however, are now in much greater measure representatives of, and responsible to, the Vorstand, and **much less, if at all, representatives of their constituents.** Events in the different national societies bear this out. In a number of national societies, including the American one, new general secretaries have been fairly quickly appointed, sometimes by specially created bodies, task forces, action groups, etc., apparently only responsible to themselves and – Dornach. The GW article about this gives many specifics, drawn from ten countries, but for lack of time, only the general trend is given here.

## **Financial Scandal in the German Society**

A deep financial crisis, which developed over the last few years in the German society, had its roots in this new style of leadership. Various functionaries and experts got together and made decisions without informing members, let alone giving them a voice. I have in my files several unanswered letters written by a concerned member to the treasurer of the German society asking for information and explanations about new forms of investing and new kinds of trusts. Similar queries have been made, and not answered, for years. The leadership had asked members to trust them and to give them the freedom

to deal with society funds in new and creative ways. In fact, former general secretary and treasurer Dieter Pommerening had said at a members' meeting in 2002, "If I were Ahriman, I would do everything in my power to keep Anthroposophists occupied with financial and constitutional issues." He was suggesting to members that these technical and economic concerns were mere distractions from spiritual striving, the true province of members. Therefore, to be good Anthroposophists, they should leave these "worldly" matters to the experts. However, Rudolf Steiner created a unified society, in which esoteric and exoteric endeavors were to be joined, exoteric issues keeping esoterics rooted in reality, while the exoteric was to be penetrated and lifted up by esoteric treatment to esoteric heights. So a good Anthroposophist must strive to understand all Society affairs and leave nothing to the experts. The experts and the leadership, to do their part, must do all that is necessary to keep the membership informed, to "invite members in" and give them a voice and a vote.

Here is a summary of the financial disaster, which I wrote a year ago, based on the article published in the GW newsletter of last fall, when the story first broke.

The German Anthroposophical Society is currently trying to cope with a financial crisis forcing it to reduce expenses to a bare minimum for years to come. The responsibility for this situation lies with financial speculations made by the German Executive Council and particularly by general secretary and treasurer Dieter Pommerening, who has been relieved of all his posts. Over the last few years, without the members' knowledge, these individuals have been transferring Society funds and responsibilities to three corporations. One of these, set up to manage funds related to real estate left to the Society (or, in some cases, purchased at high prices) has now lost millions. Due to inaccurate real estate appraisals, excessively high loans, and greatly overdrawn annuity funds, this corporation, also headed by Dieter Pommerening, is now insolvent. In the debacle, the German society lost its share of half a million Euros as well as the real estate left to the Society.

The members were not told about this situation until quite late, and are just beginning to learn the basic facts now. In spite of all this, the Board is hastily and unilaterally carrying out a questionable restructuring plan to privatize the corporation and separate it from the Society.

The 19,000-member German society is the largest national society, and, until recently, it was the wealthiest. Thus, this financial crisis also endangers the financial well being of the General Anthroposophical Society.

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A year later, the GW commentator states that a thorough investigation into the matter has yet to take place, and no-one has really claimed responsibility; instead, at a members' meeting of the German society, those concerned made excuses for themselves and each other, one of which was, that they were "in a collective daze" (or "benumbed" or "stunned" – *in einem kollektiven Betäubungszustand*) the very state against which the practice of Anthroposophy should be a safeguard. Maybe if they had let the membership in on their plans, to contribute their life experience, wisdom, common sense, and their

alertness, this “collective daze” could have been held off.

The common thread running through these reports: Anthroposophical leadership is becoming more and more autocratic, though that fact is kept as quiet as possible, and democratic “window dressing” is offered. The members, meanwhile, are too passive, and, for the most part, not alert enough to realize that their rights are being taken away. Too many of them do not see the connection between their anthroposophical work and the welfare of the General Anthroposophical Society of 1923.

If the day had twice as many hours, I would translate much more of the wealth of valuable material on this topic for you. But I hope this already gives you some insights.

Sincerely,  
Christiane Marks  
American Correspondent  
Living the Christmas Society/Gelebte  
Weihnachtstagung