

Short Report on the General Annual Members' Meeting in Dornach on April 8, 2006

A last-minute one-hour extraordinary general members' meeting took place before the regularly scheduled main meeting. The Executive Council had convened it in order to present five member motions it had initially declined. Those who brought the motions, knowing that the Council did not have the authority to withhold them from the members, and that the grounds on which they had been turned down were invalid, had declared themselves ready to go to court to secure the right to have them presented. Faced with the possibility of another lawsuit, the Council changed course and assured the members that the motions would be presented, after all, at the special 2 pm. meeting.

The time scheduled for the meeting – just one hour—was much too short for presenting, discussing, and voting on five motions, but it soon became apparent that the Council did not even intend to do so. Instead, different Council members presented countermotions *against* hearing each of the motions, urging the members to vote for these countermotions. Most members did, solely on the Council's word, without having any idea of what they were voting not to hear.

The Council thus succeeded in keeping the motions from the members, after all: As soon as the danger of a lawsuit was averted, it went back on its word. What makes this action of the Council particularly disturbing is, that all five of the suppressed motions were requests and queries directed at the Council itself. Thus, Council members were making it very plain that they did not intend to be questioned or held accountable by members in any way.

Council member Paul Mackay utilized a legal technicality in order to prevent any kind of discussion about the suppression of the motions, claiming that countermotions (motions to prevent the presentation of motions) were procedural motions, which (as he said) according to corporate law, must be voted on immediately, and regarding which no further procedural motions could be made, so there was no way any member could move to discuss the Council's course. Members who asked to speak on the subject and motions that members nevertheless tried to bring were not heard. One after the other, the motions were rapidly "dealt with" without being heard, let alone discussed or voted on.

These same procedures, deeply unworthy of Anthroposophy, were pretty much followed in the regular members meeting held from 3:00 to 6:30 pm. At this meeting, it was not Council members themselves who presented the countermotions, but a member of the actors' ensemble known to collaborate closely with the Council, but the result was the same: The few motions not stopped by countermotions could still not be freely discussed because Paul Mackay tightly controlled who could speak and for how long. Again, the

Council recommended to the members how they should vote, and, again, most followed the recommendation, without having had any chance to inform themselves or form their own conclusions.

Authors of Motions Presented in Negative Light

The Council tried to sway member opinion against the authors of the motions not only in the way it conducted the meetings, but also more directly. In speaking of the possible lawsuit, Paul Mackay said these members were “blackmailing” the Council, and Council member Heinz Zimmermann later declared they were “terrorizing” the membership. Neither of them said anything about the fact that the right to present motions was instituted by Rudolf Steiner as a central part of Anthroposophical life, and is firmly anchored in the Principles. It is all about member responsibility and participation in shaping the Society, and has nothing whatever to do with terrorizing anybody.

The only reason members had to consider going to court in the first place was that the Executive Council was denying them this basic right and there was no other way to secure it.

Free Verbal Exchange Made Impossible

This year, the Executive Council did more than ever to prevent discussion or even requests for more information about the business at hand. This was especially evident in the very sparse “discussion” about the annual financial report. Members have to hand in their intended statements in written form in advance, and they are only allowed to speak for three minutes. These restrictions, introduced by Paul Mackay, have been in effect since 2002. They make a free, direct response to what is said at meetings quite impossible, and, of course, assure that no meaningful discussion will develop. In addition, Paul Mackay was quite selective in deciding which previously handed-in statements he wished to allow the authors to share with the meeting. This year, for the first time, the agenda did not even allow for a “free discussion” unrelated to any point of business.

The Executive Council probably has a number of reasons for these actions, but one motivation is quite obvious: As already mentioned, virtually all the suppressed motions involved matters that were incriminating to the Council, and particularly events related to the refused motions show that in its conduct of Society affairs, both legally and morally, the Council is standing on very thin ice, indeed. This would no doubt have been brought up in a free discussion, and members would have asked the Council uncomfortable questions. It is this situation the Council was trying to avoid.

Open Members' Meeting

After the Annual General Members' Meeting, about 60 people attended an open meeting sponsored by the *Gelebte Weihnachtstagung*, the *Living the Christmas Conference Society*, held at the *Hotel Engel* in Dornach. Many shared their shock and dismay at the way the General Members' Meeting was conducted, especially at the actions of individual Council members. Many remarked that the Council had resorted to even more stringent and ingenious methods that ever before to prevent free discussion and exchange of information.

Due to lack of time at that open meeting, some of the issues raised still await a more thorough treatment, but members agreed at the end that the only way out of this deep crisis is to make possible just such free, open member discussions as often as possible. At the same time, all were clear on the painful fact that these free discussions would have to be fought for harder than ever.

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