

Dear friends,

The 2018 General Assembly of the General Anthroposophical Society will certainly go down in the history of the Society as an outstanding event. Among other equally important and significant aspects of the Meeting, two events stand out clearly:

1. With the annulment of the resolution of 1935, in which Ita Wegman and Elisabeth Vreede were excluded from the Executive Council, for the first time a step was taken in the process of working through the Society's history by an organ of the Society itself.
2. Likewise for the first time in the history of the General Anthroposophical Society, the membership did not comply with the wishes of the Executive Council in a question of the Council's composition.

The entire course of the General Assembly was marked by an overly tight time-schedule and by the clear will of the Executive Council not to expand the time-frame, contrary to corresponding requests from the membership. As a result, the General Meeting was characterized by being pressed for time; it was not possible to deal appropriately with the items on the agenda, and, in some cases, undignified situations arose, the responsibility for which lay with the particular moderators of those parts of the meeting. In particular, the vote on a further term of office in the Council for Paul Mackay and Bodo von Plato led to a polarization between the Society leadership and officials on the one hand, and a large part of the membership on the other; this culminated on Sunday, at the end of the entire conference and after a Class Lesson, in an outright insult toward members by the officials.

All this can, initially, only be given in outline and will be documented and explained in detail in following articles and contributions.

What was abundantly clear was the membership's vote for a more factual and truthful practice of reporting in the Society's publications *Das Goetheanum*, *Anthroposophy Worldwide*, and on the internet, as requested by the membership in Motion 8. However, the hope that this vote could bring about a change has so far been disappointed, as is clearly exemplified in the attached article.

Due to the continued one-sided way of reporting in the official reports, for the vast majority of members no real picture can emerge of what actually happened at the General Meeting. In addition, the background to some important topics discussed at the General Assembly remains largely unknown. For this reason, too, further contributions should follow. Whoever would like to contribute in this sense is cordially invited to do so.

With kind regards,

Thomas Heck

PS: Please feel free to pass along, or forward, this information. Others who are interested are also welcome to subscribe to the mailing list for this newsletter on the website www.gv-2018.com/Newsletter. As far as possible and affordable, the additional contributions should also appear in English. In addition to current contributions, the website www.gv-2018.com will also contain contributions on fundamental questions regarding the history of the Society and the Society's constitution.

Translation: T. O'Keefe

A Truly “Ugly Wake-up Call”

Article 8 of the Statutes of the General Anthroposophical Society stipulates that the Executive Council is exclusively responsible for the tasks and objectives of the Society and that the General Assembly has no binding say. From this self-understanding it was already made clear before the 2018 General Assembly that, for some of the motions [i.e., the proposals put forth by members to be voted upon at the Assembly], an implementation of the outcome of the vote would only be optional; that is, that the result of the vote would not be binding on the Executive Council. This also applied to Motion 8, which was to entrust the Executive Council with the task of ensuring balanced and truthful reporting in the Society’s publications. This demand was supported by a very clear majority at the General Assembly.

Apparently this vote by the members truly was not taken seriously, as it is indeed remarkable how the one-sided reporting continues in Wolfgang Held’s article “Ugly Wake-up Call,” in the April 20, 2018 issue¹ of the weekly magazine *Das Goetheanum* – especially since it was written in direct reference to the General Assembly at which the members had voted by a majority for a different kind of reporting. The fact that the Communications Officer of the General Anthroposophical Society, and Goetheanum spokesperson, expresses himself publicly in this way is really very striking. In any case, members will only perceive this expression to a limited extent, since many no longer receive this weekly publication. (It will probably not be long before the circulation falls below 5,000. Moreover, this contribution will likely not even be noticed in the entirety of the non-German-speaking world.) It is likewise noteworthy that the attitude behind this article is, on the one hand, publicly revealed, yet, on the other hand, not really openly articulated before the view of the entire membership.

What follows are excerpts from the article by Wolfgang Held (in italics) with my commentary.

“Ugly Wake-up Call”

“It was more distressing than ever before. This is how the staff in the cafeteria and at the reception at the Goetheanum described the atmosphere at the General Assembly of the Anthroposophical Society when it came to the confirmation of Bodo v. Plato and Paul Mackay’s positions in the Executive Council.”

Is this wording intended to give the impression that the trepidation of the atmosphere arose exclusively in connection with the vote on the extension of Bodo von Plato and Paul Mackay’s terms of office? Moreover, the wording is imprecise; it was not actually a question of *confirming* the positions of the Executive Council members, but of *renewing* the expired terms of office.

“It was likewise irritating that the number of members present for the actual vote increased by 300.”

Here the author has a poor memory, because the General Assembly is traditionally better attended on the Saturday of the Assembly – and especially during the voting period – than at other times. At the 2017 General Assembly, the difference in attendees (between the day of voting and the other days of the General Assembly) was so great that the number of ballot papers prepared was insufficient, resulting in a stoppage at the entrance to the Great Hall.

“They [the 300 additional members] had not taken part in the preceding two-day deliberations.”

¹ This can also be found on the internet (in German): <https://dasgoetheanum.com/ausgaben/2018/ausgabe-16>

The impression emerges here that the participants who had come for Saturday had not taken part at all in the important deliberations. In fact, of the eleven motions put forward by members and the additional motion from the Executive Council for a *caesura* [i.e., a pause of the current terms of office for the two Executive Council members, followed by a consideration and a vote regarding whether or not to renew these terms of office for a further seven years], only two motions were discussed on Friday; the discussion of all other all other motions occurred on Saturday, and these discussions were very well perceived by the members who had newly arrived on Saturday.² The formation of opinions about the two motions that had already been discussed on Friday (the repeal of the 1935 decision and the decision regarding the renewed terms of office) is likely to have been completed in advance for the vast majority of members. Especially regarding the *caesura*, the proponents of a further term of office did not contribute to the discussion any substantive reasons for their view, as was, in contrast, not the case during the weeks and months leading up to the General Assembly. At the General Assembly, substantial contributions were made exclusively by those who brought into question the extension of the terms of office. The short, not very informative, and incomplete reports on the activities of the two candidates were only given on Saturday, contrary to what had been planned. These reports were also perceived by the newcomers [i.e., the members who arrived on Saturday].

“From the caesura of the Executive Council members, there emerges a comprehensive halt – a halt that comes at a high price.”

How can one understand this last sentence? Will there actually come about a comprehensive halt for the officials or Goetheanum Leadership? A halt with regard to what or whom? The membership? And what could be meant by the “high price”?

“For the ‘How’ of the election process had barely anything to do with the much quoted ‘care of the soul-spiritual life’.”

Here, too, there are only hints that are perhaps directed at the membership? An insinuation regarding that part of the membership which was of the opinion that a further period of activity on the Executive Council for Paul Mackay and Bodo von Plato would not make sense? It may be possible to describe in more detail at a later time how the members, in recent months, had been given no basis for judgment whatsoever, upon which to arrive at a responsible decision on this question. It is evident that it was merely reported that intensive deliberations on the *caesura* had taken place. Nothing was reported about the content of these deliberations. Even the interview in the weekly magazine *Das Goetheanum* (March 10, 2018) was more like a conventional election canvassing and was free of content, just as were the written contributions [by the Council Members up for reaffirmation] to the General Assembly in *Anthroposophy Worldwide* (No. 1-2/2018). (In any case, engaged members were able to obtain for themselves the necessary basis for judgement over the course of the last few years due to the quite obvious orientation of the Goetheanum’s development, and they will certainly have

² The temporally dispersed structure of the General Assembly, which was embedded in the larger conference “The Annual Meeting of the General Anthroposophical Society,” had met with different reactions in advance. Particularly for members visiting from other countries, participation on all days would have meant significant cost and time-commitment.

done so.) This way of dealing with the members hardly served the “care of the soul life . . . in the human Society.”³

“The standing and sustained ovation for the 17 and 22 years of Executive Council work was then also the desire to close the wounds that had just been inflicted – understandable and contradictory.

Again, a one-sided assessment of the members’ behaviour: Is it incompatible for Wolfgang Held that one is of the opinion that someone should no longer be active on the Executive Council and nevertheless give him human and heartfelt applause for the past? Is this behaviour not perhaps precisely a contribution to a “care of the soul life” in the Society?

“No different than in one’s own soul’s household, where an ugly stroke enters and separates and then casts its light, there could also be something illuminating here in the darkening. I suspect it is here: The key to humility and magnanimity toward others is not found in one’s own convictions and ideals, it does not grow out of anything given, it will not be brought about by anthroposophy and not by Rudolf Steiner, but this magnanimity is based solely on the personal decision to will others and their otherness”.

This conclusion actually represents a sad climax in which the author goes so far as to express moral presumptions, subtle intimations, and judgments. Is this possibly a projection? Is it not precisely the author who lacks “magnanimity” and respect for the thinking and will of a part of the membership that does not correspond to his own? How can this attitude be reconciled with a free spiritual-cultural life? How is it possible that in our Society someone can be a Goetheanum spokesperson, responsible for communication at the Goetheanum, and editor of the weekly publication *Das Goetheanum*, and yet can be so publicly condescending, moralizing, and discrediting toward a part of the membership? And this is by no means the first time.

But what is perhaps even more serious: How is it possible that many members allow for such statements, one might even say “insults,” to be offered again and again? And why is there not a storm of indignation? In this latter aspect, I see the real main problem in our Society.

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³ What the quote [“care of the soul-spiritual life”] cited by Wolfgang Held refers to is not entirely clear to me; possibly it refers to the Statutes of the Christmas Conference Society, where it says in the first statute: “The Anthroposophical Society should be an association of human beings who wish to cultivate the soul life in individual human beings and in human society on the basis of a true spiritual knowledge of the spiritual world.”