

## On the development of the motion procedure in the General Anthroposophical Society

In the statutes of the Anthroposophical Society of the Christmas Conference of 1923, written by Rudolf Steiner, the right to submit motions was already enshrined in an unrestricted way. In 1975, the system for submitting motions in the General Anthroposophical Society was modified by an amendment to the bylaws; it should only be possible to submit motions that concerned legal matters; anything else should be treated as a matter of concern in free debates without resulting votes. It was and is not always possible to reach agreement between the applicants and the Executive Council<sup>1</sup> on the distinction between motions and concerns. This regulation on the right to submit motions still applies today, but between 1999 and 2002 there were initiatives on the part of the Executive Council to considerably restrict the right of motion within the framework of the General Anthroposophical Society's attempts to reconstitute itself.<sup>2</sup>

In Swiss Association law, the general meeting is the highest body and the executive council carries out what the members want. Such a structure was not intended for the Society initiated by Rudolf Steiner at the Christmas Conference; on the one hand, he himself described the foundation or appointment to the Board as an "aristocratic" act. On the other hand, he discussed the bylaws in detail with the members in three readings and put them to the vote - including bylaws applying to the Executive Council. Thus a society (an Association under Swiss law, even though Rudolf Steiner never spoke of an Association in connection with the Anthroposophical Society<sup>3</sup>) with a somewhat free relationship between the Executive Council and its members was created. According to Rudolf Steiner, he would have resigned if the election of the Executive Council were to be different from the one proposed by him. Rudolf Steiner's liberty therefore consisted of being able to resign at any time if the members were to make "unlawful" use of their democratic right in a certain way - and thus also call into question the substance of the Anthroposophical Society.

During the years around the turn of the millennium, the Executive Council of the General Anthroposophical Society obviously felt limited in its freedom to act by the unrestricted right of its members to submit motions and considered it necessary to drastically limit these opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1999, 3 attempts have been made in this direction:

### Attempt 1

In 1999, the so-called Group of Seven<sup>5</sup> presented a draft of the statutes, which was originally to be put to the vote at the 2000 General Assembly. This draft of the statutes suggested the following with regard to the right to submit motions:

- "Motions by individual members or groups of members are only possible on the agenda set by the Executive Council."

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<sup>1</sup> Newsletter "What else is going on in the General Anthroposophical Society", No. 2/July 2018, [www.gv-2018.com](http://www.gv-2018.com)

<sup>2</sup> One is inclined to assume that this was a measure against the flood of applications, especially by the grouping of the "Gelebte Weihnachtstagung". However, this is not stated as a reason by the Executive Council, see below.

<sup>3</sup> The "Anthroposophical Society" founded at the Christmas Conference is to be distinguished from the "General Anthroposophical Society" which is the "Verein des Goetheanums Freie Hochschule für Geisteswissenschaft", the so-called "Bauverein", which was renamed on February 8, 1925.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Mackay on the restriction of membership rights, NB 51-52/2002 of 15.12.2002.

<sup>5</sup> The group of seven is the 2<sup>nd</sup> constitutional group, which was to work out a new constitution. Members of this group: Otfried Dörfler, Michaela Glöckler, Rolf Kerler, Paul Mackay, Roel Mun-niks, Charlotte Roder, Manfred Schmidt-Brabant.

- "Society resolutions are only valid when they are passed by both the General Secretaries Assembly and by the General Assembly."
- The General Secretaries' Assembly should be established as a body of the Society with rules of procedure for this body determined by the Executive Council. The draft of these rules of procedure stipulates that General Secretaries may not only be appointed - but may also be removed - by the Executive Council on the proposal of the National Societies.

This would have severely restricted the ability of members to submit motions. (The motions for the General Assembly 2017 and also the member motions of 2018, for example, could not have been submitted according to these regulations). At a meeting with members of a former commission<sup>6</sup> and the Executive Council, massive criticism was already voiced on central points of the draft statute. This led to the decision of the Group of Seven not to present the draft statutes of membership, although a meeting had already been called for this purpose. Instead of the draft statutes, a "wastepaper basket"<sup>7</sup> was presented in which the draft had been "thrown". This so-called "wastebasket statute" has not been published in the news bulletin. This attempt to give the constitution an extremely authoritative form which massively restricts the right of self-determination of the members as well as the National Societies, is largely unknown in the membership and even in leadership circles.<sup>8</sup>

## Attempt 2

At the 2001 General Assembly<sup>9</sup>, Rembert Biemond submitted and negotiated a motion to change the members' right of motion, which included for the following regulation:

- Motions for the Ordinary General Meeting may be submitted by members provided that the proposal is signed by at least 2 percent of the members (based on the number of members in the previous year); and furthermore, by the Executive Council, the General Secretaries and the auditors."

This rule would have meant that applications could only have been made if they had been submitted jointly by about 900 members. A motion by Ulrich Hölder to postpone Rembert Biemond's motion and to have a weekend meeting on the right of application was accepted. So the right of motion remained unchanged. Almost the entire Executive Council had voted against the postponement<sup>10</sup>, i.e. supported R. Biemond's proposal. Gerhard von Beckerath wrote: "Rembert Biemond told the meeting on motions on 10 and 11 November 2001 in Dornach that he had only submitted this motion in agreement with the Executive Council." He also stated that he was not sticking to the motion.<sup>1112</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This was the first working group on the Constitution; see Bulletin (NB) No. 44 of 1.11.1998.

<sup>7</sup> NB No. 48 of 28.11.1999 and No. 49 of 05.12.1999 as well as "Urteilsgrundlagen für die Bildung einer gegenwartsgerechten Gestalt der Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft" by Gerhard von Beckerath et al., private print 1999.

<sup>8 8</sup> This draft of the statutes, the so-called "wastepaper basket draft", was published in "Urteilsgrundlagen für die Bildung einer gegenwartsgerechten Gestalt der Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft" by Gerhard von Beckerath et al., private print 1999, and can be requested as a copy from the author.

<sup>9</sup> NB 18 of 29.04.2001

<sup>10</sup> From an interesting correspondence between Paul Mackay and Detlef Oluf Böhm, self-published by the latter in "Dokumentation zum individuelle Antragsrecht und zur Geschichte eines Ordnungsantrags", November 2001, according to which all board members except Paul Mackay voted against the motion.

<sup>11</sup> From an undated report by Gerhard von Beckerath for the Frankfurt model groups.

<sup>12</sup> This is confirmed by the report by Detlef Oluf Böhm in "Mitteilungen aus der anthroposophischen Arbeit in Deutschland", No. 218, Christmas 2001.

## Intermezzo

On 10 and 11 November 2001, the conference on motions was held at the Goetheanum. Controversial points of view were discussed and a common process seemed to emerge, but that did not seem to be the intention of all participants. Ulrich Rösch's report ends: "Paul Mackay ended the meeting, but left open how this work could and should be continued."<sup>13</sup>

A further meeting was held in Stuttgart on 9 February 2002 without any agreements being reached. Here are 2 comments from the reports of the meeting<sup>14</sup>:

1. In November [at the first meeting] it had already become apparent that the danger for the individual right of motion for the members at general assemblies was off the table according to Paul Mackay."<sup>15</sup>
2. In a footnote it was stated: "Rembert Biemond - with the internal approval of the Executive Council - had proposed at the 2001 General Assembly to drastically restrict the individual right to submit proposals."<sup>16</sup>

No further events and discussions have taken place. Shortly afterwards, the Executive Council initiative to "solve" the constitutional question was announced (reconstitution of the Christmas Conference Society, declaration of 23 March 2002<sup>17</sup>). In connection with this initiative, another attempt was made to restrict the right to submit motions.

## Attempt 3

At the reconstitution meeting for the General Anthroposophical Society (WTG<sup>18</sup>) on 28 and 29 December 2002, a voting marathon (amendments to the statutes and numerous motions, a total of approx. 45 votes) was held and decided as follows (from the minutes):

### Draft Resolution 7

In Article 10 [of the Statutes of the Christmas Conference Society], a third paragraph is inserted with the following wording:

*"The invitations to the Annual General Meeting and to the Extraordinary General Meeting, i.e. to General Meetings, shall be published in the Society's organ. **Motions may only refer to the announced agenda.**"*

Two amendments were tabled to this draft decision. Ulf Waltz makes and justifies the motion not to accept the restriction of the right of motion to the fixed agenda items formulated in the draft resolution and thus to delete the last sentence of the draft resolution. Ursula Piffaretti's motion proposes to clarify the last sentence of the proposed resolution, i.e. to replace it with the following sentence: "Motions may only relate to those matters for resolution which are included in the announced agenda ". Bodo from Plato comments on this.

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<sup>13</sup> NB 48 of 25.11.2001, see also NB 12 of 17.3.2002 and NB 17 of 21.4.2002

<sup>14</sup> Communications from anthroposophical work in Germany, IV/2001 and NB 48 of 25.11.2002

<sup>15</sup> This turned out to be an error: see attempt 3.

<sup>16</sup> NB 12 of 17.3.2002, footnote 2

<sup>17</sup> NB 17 of 21.4.2002

<sup>18</sup> This AAG-WTG was to be the Christmas Conference Society, which was to be revived by this extraordinary general meeting. Two groups of members filed a lawsuit against this action and court proceedings were held. The courts ruled that this AAG-WTG was not an Association under Swiss law. Therefore, the current amendments to the Articles of Association of 2002 have no effect. Within the scope of this article, only the initiatives of the Executive Council to restrict or de facto abolish the right of motion for the members shall be presented.

Vote: The Waltz and Piffaretti amendments were put to the vote against each other (relative majority). The Piffaretti amendment receives significantly more support and is to be put to the vote.

Peter Schlegel and Michael Voelkel speak on this matter.

Vote: The Piffaretti amendment is adopted with a clear majority.

Final vote: The draft decision as amended due to the motion brought forward by Mrs Piffaretti is adopted by a clear majority. The decision is therefore:

A third paragraph is inserted into Article 10 to read as follows:

*"The invitations to the Annual General Meeting and to the Extraordinary General Meeting, i.e. to General Meetings, shall be published in the Society's organ. Motions may relate only to those matters for resolution which are included in the announced agenda."<sup>19</sup>*

In this wording, the 1999 regulation from the so-called "waste paper basket draft" reappears.

Two groups of members appealed against this attempt at reconstitution, which led to the trials in 2003-2004. The judgments rendered all resolutions null and void and thus also the restriction of the right of motion.

This does not change the fact that, due to initiatives of the Executive Council in the years 1999 to 2003 and despite statements to the contrary (see paragraph "Intermezzo", item 1), several attempts were made to drastically restrict the right of motions by members. All protests against this and also all attempts to enter into a constructive process to reach amicable solutions were obviously not in the interest of the Executive Council and came to nothing.

## **Conclusion**

If one considers the statutes of the Christmas Conference Society, no legal relationships between the Executive Council and members were regulated there - apart from the regulations for the School of Spiritual Science. This created a completely free relationship. The statutes of our General Anthroposophical Society, whose origin lies in the "Bauverein" (e.g. the exclusion regulation), have a completely contrary character. In a society oriented towards liberty, as an anthroposophical society wants and should be, such restrictions as those described here are not appropriate. In 1999, a corresponding draft of the articles of association ended up in the trash, but not the intentions associated with it, as was ultimately shown in the draft of the articles of association for reconstitution in 2002. The hope remains that after more than 15 years, these intentions are finally obsolete and will not experience a renaissance.

Dornach, 11 October 2017, Thomas Heck, revised 1 July 2018

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<sup>19</sup> NB No. 3 of 19.01.2003, Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting of AAG-WTG 28./29.12.2003