

# Two steps forward, one step back...

## A constructive review of the Annual General Meeting of the Anthroposophical Society from 26-28 April 2024 in Dornach

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In retrospect, the 2024 Annual General Meeting (AGM), which I attended on site from start to finish, seems ambivalent. Much was successful and constructive, the preparation in the member forums and the work of the preparatory committee, in which members also took part, was clearly noticeable. The AGM was much more constructive, community-building and less confrontational than previous ones. In my experience, Friday was a complete success, but there were difficulties on Saturday. By summarising some of the critical points below, I do not want to diminish the positive aspects, but rather help to do better in the future.

### Invitation to the Annual General Meeting

The invitation to the General Assembly by the Executive Board was not balanced, but was biased against Motion 8 (Accountability and appointment of the Goetheanum leadership) and Motion 17 (positioning on "One Health"). The title of the invitation in the journal and newsletter "Anthroposophy Worldwide" (AWW 2024/4) was: "How do we do justice to human freedom in our Society? The relationship between members, the Executive Board and the School of Spiritual Science". The invitation, signed by the entire Executive Board, went on to say: "However, there are also proposals that we believe significantly jeopardise the work and the basic shape of the School of Spiritual Science as formed at the Christmas Conference. Claims are being made that fail to recognise the necessary freedom of the School of Spiritual Science and the work of the Sections as independent departments of research and teaching." The Board's message was unmistakable: there are proposals from members that jeopardise the Goetheanum! Please come to the AGM to avert this danger! At the same time, however, these two motions were not presented at all. As far as I understood it, the applicants were concerned with safeguarding the freedom of spiritual life and counteracting any power structures. What the applicants had said was not mentioned or quoted at all in the invitation. Instead, only the view of the Executive Board was described. In AWW 2024/4, the resolution texts of the motions were printed, but no reasons or background were given. On Page 8 there was a lengthy commentary by the Executive Board on Motion 8 (Goetheanum leadership), and the topic was then continued on page 10 with a contribution by Ueli Hurter on the "Development of the leadership structures at the Goetheanum since 2012". Both these texts are helpful, but the reader of AWW 2024/4 had no way of even understanding what the 130 members who have tabled Motion 8, wanted. The reader could only perceive the perspective of the Executive Board.

With this invitation, the spirit of co-operation and understanding was abandoned and a call to battle was issued. In doing so, the Board of Directors cast a shadow over the AGM that contradicts the otherwise demonstrated willingness to cooperate.

As the invitation was only signed by the four members of the Executive Board, the preparatory committee was presumably not included, although it had been set up specifically for this purpose.

My wish for the future:

- When a topic is emphasised in the invitation to an AGM, then this should be described neutrally and both sides should be presented.
- If there is a preparatory committee, it should also be involved in all the main processes.

## **Many members were unable to read the proposals in full and prepare themselves**

The original version of the motions for the AGM, including the explanatory statement, could only be read in a PDF document in the internal section of the Goetheanum website. However, there are many members of the General Anthroposophical Society who do not or only reluctantly use the Internet and not everyone has a printer available. There were printed conference documents in German and English for the meeting. However, the original motions were not printed in these documents either, only the summaries of the motions similarly to AWW 2024/4. Without explanatory statements, the motions are not comprehensible. This meant that many members were unable to understand the motions.

From a practical point of view, printing the motions, including explanatory statements, is not a problem; today's copiers are efficient and printing services deliver cheaply and quickly. This whole incomprehensible procedure creates the impression that the AGM has been manipulated by withholding information. The manipulation strategy that was already evident in the invitation to the AGM was thus continued.

It is understandable that only summaries are printed in AWW due to the limited number of pages. However, it is incomprehensible why this was not communicated to the applicants, together with the request to provide a corresponding summary or to correct the editors' suggestions, which would then be printed in AWW. All it would have taken was an email to 20 people. Then, for example, three key sentences could have been included from the sometimes long explanatory statements.

As there was no communication at this point, I myself had the problem with Motion 18 (dealing with supersensible perceptions as a matter of course) that I was named as the main applicant and thus emphasised to my colleagues because I had sent the email with the concern. It would have been more correct to say "Working Group 'Future of the GAS' in members' forum and 36 co-applicants". An unfortunate inaccuracy that could have been avoided by prior communication.

My wish for the future:

- Members who have registered for the Annual General Meeting should receive all motions, including explanatory statements, by email or, if requested, in printed form by post.
- At the beginning of the General Meeting, all motions, including justifications, must be available in printed form as meeting documents.
- Applicants should be informed that only a summary can be printed in AWW and they should be asked to provide a summary themselves or to release a summary by a fixed date.

## **Own rules were not followed**

At the beginning of the AGM, it was announced that Motions of Order would always be moderated by Harald Jäckel. In this case, the moderation would then be handed over to Harald Jäckel by Board members Justus Wittich and Ueli Hurter. This did actually happen several times on Friday. However, on Saturday, this rule was repeatedly disregarded and Harald Jäckel was not included. This had degraded Harald Jäckel's role and at the same time gave the impression that the Board of Directors did not want to hand over the process to a neutral moderator, especially at critical moments.

- For the future, I hope that the declared procedural rules will be adhered to.

## **No discussion on Motion 8 (Accountability and appointment of the Goetheanum leadership)**

This Motion had been submitted by 130 members. I myself was not one of the applicants. Its topic was the same as the title of the entire AGM: "The relationship between members, the Executive Board and the Free School of Spiritual Science". An extra-large time slot had been reserved in the agenda for this Motion as a particularly "controversial motion". One could therefore have expected the topic to be discussed at the Annual General Meeting. However, this was not the case. In a moment of confusion, the discussion was ended before it even began due to a Motion of Order by Marc Desaulles.

It was a sombre moment of division. The concerns of 130 members were not even discussed. This complete disregard leaves a bitter aftertaste. This is no way to create social peace. If there is a fair discussion at the AGM, everyone knows what is at stake, and then a motion is rejected, then this can be accepted more readily by the applicants, because they have been heard. Now it remains in the annals that they were not even heard.

This stalling of the discussion was preceded by complex processes.

The plan for Saturday 27 April 2024 was as follows: motions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 will be dealt with in the morning and motions 8 and 9 in the afternoon after the lunch break.

Surprisingly, however, the Executive Board tabled Motion 0 shortly before the AGM without this having been discussed in the preparatory group and integrated into the schedule. In doing so, the Executive Board undermined the original and long-balanced schedule. A report on the constitution process by Gerald Häfner was scheduled for Saturday morning. In addition to this report, Motion 0 was now submitted, which required a vote.

A lot of time was spent on dealing with this Motion, namely the whole morning. The stated rule of a 10-minute presentation and three pleas in favour and three against was not followed. As a result, the entire Saturday morning was spent on this motion and Motions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were postponed to the afternoon, which had actually been intended for Motions 8 and 9.

The last-minute submission of Motion 0 is a problem. Nobody knew about it; most members were surprised by it on Friday morning. Only the members who receive Thomas Heck's newsletter were informed of Motion 0 a few days before the AGM. So how should we prepare for it?

Another problem was the clumsy wording of the motion, which was bound to lead to discussions. A preliminary discussion of the Motion with members would have made this clear. Unfortunately, however, no such preliminary discussion took place. It would have been best if Gerald Häfner's motion had been presented at the Constitutional Conference from 23 to 25 February 2024. A text agreed there would have been well prepared and would probably have gone through smoothly at the AGM.

Let's summarise: While the member forum groups that became active at the AGM were aware that time was short and tried to limit themselves accordingly so that the schedule could be adhered to, the Board itself destroyed the schedule with Motion 0.

As the Motion was obviously quickly shot from the hip, there was no preliminary discussion and improvement of the wording of the motion; instead, this process had to take place at the AGM, which was very time-consuming. The vote on Motion 0 did not take place until the afternoon.

As a result, the afternoon was predictably under time pressure. Ueli Hurter repeatedly emphasised this and exerted pressure. One alternative would have been to shorten the reports on Saturday late afternoon and make them more concise. However, this possibility of gaining time was not discussed; instead, the aim was to deal with all open motions on this afternoon, an endeavour that was impossible from the outset.

Motion 8 was then called at a time when the meeting was ready for a break. The audience's absorption capacity was exhausted. These were extremely unfavourable conditions for dealing with such an important topic.

The following motions were submitted for this agenda item:

1. Thomas Heck and 130 signatories originally proposed an amendment to the Articles of Association and appointment regulations. As far as I know, Thomas Heck had already announced that he was withdrawing this Motion.
2. Instead, there was a new Motion by Thomas Heck, which no longer envisaged a final amendment to the Articles of Association, but rather a more differentiated further discussion of the topic. Most of those present were unaware of this new Motion, as it had been submitted shortly before the AGM and had not been distributed to everyone.
3. There was also a countermotion by Uwe Werner to reject the proposal, maintain the status quo and call for a consultative vote on the matter.
4. And there was also a countermotion from the Goetheanum leadership to maintain the status quo.

However, the meeting was not aware of this status of the motions. Instead, some of those present did not even realise that there had been a transition from Motion 7 to Motion 8, as Uwe Werner and Thomas Heck were also involved in Motion 7 and the new Motion 8 had not yet been explained.

Now the following happened: Thomas Heck stood at the lectern and wanted to start explaining both motions.

However, he was not given the floor, but Ueli Hurter, who was in charge of moderation, asked Uwe Werner whether his motion was to stop the discussion and not to vote. This question was completely nonsensical, as Uwe Werner had called for a discussion and a consultative vote in his written motion. Accordingly, Uwe Werner answered Ueli Hurter's question in the negative.

Thomas Heck now started a sentence. At this moment, Marc Desaulles came forward and demanded that the discussion be cancelled with a Motion of Order, as Motion 8 would destroy the freedom of the School of Spiritual Science.

Ueli Hurter then called for a vote, the motion was carried by a majority, the item on the agenda was immediately closed and the people were released to their long-awaited break.

The following questions arise:

- Why was Ueli Hurter unaware of the motions he was supposed to moderate and blamed Uwe Werner for having tabled a motion to stop the discussion? This can only be explained by the fact that this wish was the father of the idea. Ueli Hurter wanted to get the topic off the table and therefore consciously or unconsciously brought the discussion into play. However, Uwe Werner did not pick up the ball, instead Marc Desaulles came into play and took over the ball. Marc Desaulles was part of the preparatory group for the AGM and works closely with the Goetheanum's Executive Board.

- Ueli Hurter's manipulative moderation continued. Actually, Harald Jäckel should have taken over the hearing of Marc Desaulles' Motion of Order. However, there was no question of this, instead Ueli Hurter held it in his hands and everything happened very quickly.
- The third manipulation was that, in my perception, it was not clear what the Motion of Order referred to: To the original Motion, to the new Motion by Thomas Heck, to the Motion by Uwe Werner, to the Motion by the Goetheanum leadership or to all motions at the same time? This was not clarified by Ueli Hurter as moderator, but should have been stated. Thus, a vote with an unclear scope took place.
- In each case, the Meeting decided to discontinue the discussion of an item that was not yet known.
- These circumstances have caused displeasure among some members. Ueli Hurter therefore raised the issue again on Sunday. However, he only asked the meeting to vote on whether there should be two or three more contributions on this agenda item, but did not say that the agenda item should be presented at all. This was then apparently rejected by the meeting. I say apparently because the majority of votes was not obviously clear from where I was sitting. However, in this situation, no one requested a count of the votes.
- One problem was, of course, the last-minute amendment to the motion by Thomas Heck. This meant that there was hardly any opportunity for members to deal with it, if they even realised that there was a new motion.

My wish for the future:

- How can we avoid motions with clumsy and time-consuming wording being submitted to the AGM? This can probably only be achieved through a preliminary filter. To this end, an extra members' forum could be held five or four weeks before the AGM, where the motions are discussed seriously and voted on in consultation. This could improve the wording or persuade some applicants to withdraw their motion. Although a meeting between the Executive Board and the applicants took place on 16 March, this meeting was not designed in such a way that the content of the proposals could really be discussed.
- The Executive Board itself should take care not to undermine the schedule by submitting motions at short notice.
- The moderation of agenda items in which the Board is emotionally strongly involved must be placed in neutral hands. It is all too easy for unconscious manipulation to occur, which then damages the meeting.