

## FOREWORD

This article originally appeared in "Mitteilungen aus der Anthroposophischen Arbeit in Deutschland" in 1956. It aroused lively interest and was subsequently reprinted in the *Lehrrundbrief* Vol. II, 1970.

Dr. Lehrs was a teacher at the Waldorf School in Stuttgart (Uhlandshöhe) for many years. The article has been reprinted as an aid to faculties and colleges of teachers to address the problem of school government and administration. As one may wish to refer to this subject directly, the dates of the Conferences (the transcripts of the meetings Rudolf Steiner had with the faculty of the Waldorf School between the years 1921 and 1924) dealing with the subject are:

August 20, 1919  
 September 25, 1919  
 July 20, 1920  
 January 15, 1921  
 January 23, 1923  
 January 31, 1923

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*November, 1986*

**T**he first mention of the concept "Republican" is to be found already in the welcoming address given by Rudolf Steiner on the eve of the opening of the first Course for Teachers ("Conferences," Vol. I, Aug. 20, 1919). One reads there that "the school should have a republican administration, should become truly a Republic of Teachers." The reasons for this may be read in the aforementioned transcripts. In accordance with this, we find in the Conference of January 23, 1923 (Vol. II) a discussion of a revised form of administration which had become necessary because of certain difficulties. Here Rudolf Steiner said that a form would have to be found of such a kind as to "violate the republican constitution." Since my own activity at the school started somewhat later, I only know of the nature of the difficulties from personal reports. At any rate, Rudolf Steiner's remark indicated that there must have been some un-republican goings-on within the faculty. In the same faculty meeting report we find a little later that difficulties arise only "because of the traditionally democratic constitution of the school." It is clear that these two kinds of constitutions are not to be considered identical, as is unfortunately so often done in our circles.\*

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\*There is no conflict between this and the passage in the faculty meeting of January 16, 1921, where the proper structuring of the faculty is characterized by the expression "republican-democratic." This formulation was meant to be used for the "general public." Moreover, by being preceded by "republican," the "democratic" is included in the former.

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For an understanding of my theme, it is necessary to interject an observation with regard to the nature of the Conference Transcripts generally. In his preface to the first volume of the Transcripts, Erich Gabert describes how these texts were compiled, and he points to their inevitably fragmentary character.

Thus it is quite clear that in the report of the Conference of January 23, 1923, there is something missing in the transcript between the mentioning of the necessity to protect the republican nature of the constitution from being violated, and the critical remark about the taking hold of traditionally democratic methods. At least several of those present remember that Rudolf Steiner said emphatically, "republican—not democratic," so that it was reported to me in that wording later, when there was cause to remember. Rudolf Steiner never referred to it again during the time of my working under him. The reason was probably that he wanted to leave it to our own endeavors to find our own way in accordance with the demands of life, and to acquire the ability to handle such matters realistically. How much he was aware that by so doing, a totally new and difficult task was put to such a working community, may be seen in the fact that he introduced the discussion in question as one dealing with a ticklish chapter.

The following description is the outcome of a certain clarity acquired in the course of suffering through the largely democratic handling of our affairs, which, after Rudolf Steiner's death, became the rule among the faculty—resulting in painful waste of time and strength. Let me begin by describing the phenomenon of an exemplary republican attitude which I encountered on the occasion of a monthly assembly, shortly before I myself started to teach at the school. The pleasant surprise of it made the incident unforgettable. After the assembly, I heard two eurythmists criticize the order of the program to which both had contributed various numbers. They mentioned how, from the very beginning, neither of them had been content with the order. Since both agreed in their criticism, I asked in some astonishment why they hadn't changed the order, or rather caused it to be changed. Whereupon it was explained that by decision of the faculty one member was entrusted with shaping the program. He did this in the light of having seen the rehearsals, after which

changes were out of the question. If everyone concerned continued to put his two cents in until the last minute, nothing would ever get done. "Once we have given one of us the job, we have to abide by the decisions even when we don't agree with them." I had occasion to remember that episode in later days, when the principle was often painfully violated.

In view of the hazy interpretation of the two concepts in question, it seems fitting to call to mind their historical origins.

The first social structures of humanity were oriented "vertically," i.e., determined from above by supersensible guidance. The establishing and maintaining of such structures was in the hands of the initiate-priest. The respective rung on which the members of such a structure were to be found was determined by the blood relationship into which they were born. This determined the capacities and thereby the fields of activity of the individual within the organism of the whole. To channel them appropriately was the task of the initiate who represented the deity, or, in other words, the deity acted through the instrument of the initiate. This theocratic ordering gave way for the first time in Greece to a democracy; in Rome to a republic. We misunderstand the former, however, if we apply to the term its present meanings. The word means "folk-rule" (rulership by the people) and was meant to convey that what had formerly been ordered and administered purely from above was now put into the hands of the members of the social community. But still each "folk" consisted of blood-related groups, each with its own group-soul through which was experienced a particular spiritual entity. To this spiritual being one referred in all communal matters, and to him one felt correspondingly responsible. One may cite the case of the Athenian Aristides who was highly esteemed by his fellow citizens as a "just man" (an epithet actually given him), a loner, well ahead of his epoch. Nevertheless he was exiled for having separated himself from the group-soul.

It was not until Rome that this still vertical view disappeared, and there appeared for the first time the concept "socius": the partner, in keeping with the new outlook which, compared with the former, may be called "horizontal." The ordering and handling of communal

matters was from now on a matter of the public: *res publica*. True, a vertical ranking was still necessary, but it was now the result of resolutions by the socii, based on insights accessible to all into matters of common import, as well as to their individual judgments regarding the suitability of the fellow citizens entrusted with various public functions. How little the Romans were, in the long run, able to master such a social structure is shown by the fact that their history degenerated into the rule of the Caesars and the auto-deification of the omnipotent ruler.

For an understanding of the matter we need to elucidate yet another sociological concept, namely that of Aristocracy. In later times this came to mean a social class, a stratum of the populace that was connected by certain blood-ties. It was set apart from other strata, and was distinguished by certain privileges and obligations. Originally, this was by no means so. For, according to its derivation, this concept—as also that of democracy—does not denote a class but a certain social set-up, namely a “Ruling by the Best” (ocplotol), where the fact of being “better” socially did however have its origin in consanguinity. In the fight against the traditional claims of a vertical “aristocratic” order founded solely on privilege of birth, there emerged in more recent times the concept of democracy, but now without the possibility of relating to the supersensible being of the “demos.” From now on, all are members of the “folk” and determine their common matters as equals. This led to the modern concept of parliament with its various systems of representation of group-interests by elected representatives based on a majority vote. Rudolf Steiner pointed out how thereby a basically timely social impulse was prevented from taking effect. (Lecture of October 20, 1918, “From Symptom to Reality in Modern History,” Rudolf Steiner Press, London).

It is precisely this falsification, brought about by the still existing inability of modern man to formulate concepts adequate to the new social impulse, which the western world today generally calls “democracy.” And it was *this* facet of democracy to which Rudolf Steiner referred in his caution “not democratic.” What image of a *modus operandi* for a true Teachers’ Republic may we gain from all this?

The faculty meetings in our schools are customarily divided into a pedagogical part and an administrative part (the latter going by various names). It is the latter which is usually difficult to master, just because it provides the training ground for the new social conduct. Characteristically, this part of the meeting is missing in a school with a directorial administration. It is needed only where school matters (*res*) are the concern of all teachers (*publica*). In such a faculty, every member is entitled and obliged to be informed about all internal and external matters affecting the school, and every member is equally entitled and obliged to take part in the common deliberations with regard to the administering of the school, both generally and in detail.

The carrying out of specific functions—such as dealing with the authorities, with parents, finances, supervision of building, school supplies, etc., also the chairing of faculty meetings—requires individuals to whom these functions are entrusted. They are given charge by their colleagues because they are judged to be “best suited” for a particular function. Such a charge may, and for obvious reasons with which we shall deal further—*must* generally be of limited duration, the length also being determined by common consent.

By an initially democratic process, the faculty thus creates a hierarchy of officers, but subsequently abstains from further democratic relations with them. For now, there comes into play that force which may be indicated by the above quoted example from the life of the school: for the duration of their respective terms, these officers constitute an “aristocracy” within the faculty, an aristocracy by whose decisions the “folk” have to abide. At this transition from democracy to true republic—which, as we have seen, in no way stands in conflict with the true concept of aristocracy—two important factors now come into play. If they are not properly taken into account and at all times handled consciously, the republic is in constant danger of either becoming a mere democracy on the one hand, or an oligarchy (government by the few) on the other. It is these very factors which are time and again subverted by our all-too-human nature. To recognize them and incorporate them properly into everyday practices constitutes, therefore, the difficult, yet true social task. This calls for a sacrifice on both sides.

(1) Once an officer has been charged with an assignment, he should be able to give his best to its execution. However, a person contributes his best to a cause only when he can, to some degree, be creatively active. This calls for the possibility of free initiative, for then only can he work out of his ego. He must therefore not be hindered in this by constant democratic nagging, or, even worse, by democratically voting resolutions that would affect his assignment, and force him to act on these resolutions pertaining to his field of action. It is not always easy in day-to-day living to refrain from such interfering. For while the officer was indeed elected by the community as the "best," nobody is perfect, and it may happen that in one or the other case a non-officer would really have done a better job. At such times it is up to the community to practice the restraint which they incurred by singling out one of their number, and to share every consequence of the officer's action and stand by him in brotherly fashion. If in the long run he proves unsuitable, there is the possibility of replacing him at the end of his term—or, in extreme cases, even before. However, an assumed or real mistake must not lead to a curtailing or preventing of an officer's further acts of initiative; otherwise his actions will surely become ever more faulty. In fact, while thinking to have proof for mistrusting such an officer's abilities, one does not see that the fault lies in oneself.

I can remember several cases where our faculty, once it had slipped into democracy, inhibited the power of initiative of a member to the point of destroying it completely. And this was not altered by the fact that, in order to avoid democratic procedure, majority votes were replaced by unanimity as a precondition for action—a procedure that was tried for a time as a result of a misunderstood indication of Rudolf Steiner's. For then it might happen that the officer in question would bring a well-deliberated proposal before the faculty, and one dissenting voice was enough to prevent the action from being taken. Some colleagues would then console themselves with the fact that "at least nothing" was being done.

Reality is different. Let us imagine the state within a faculty before the introduction of an individual initiative as "zero level," with a positive field above and a negative field below. By introducing the initiative, a situation above the zero level is created. If the initiative

is stifled as described, the situation does not return to zero, but as far below it as it had previously been above! In this way there are created in the life-organism of an institution certain spiritual values into which spirits quite other than the good guiding spirits of that particular human community begin to work.

(2) The second of the above-mentioned two factors presents itself when the officer, after having consulted with the whole faculty, himself arrives at the conviction that he had better not act, or had better act differently. This brings us to the other side of the social problem with which we are dealing. For, despite the "aristocratic" freedom of action of the officers, the "res" must remain "publica." This necessitates a constant stream of proper information to the whole community on matters concerning all, so that the single members are in possession of the prerequisites for adequate judgments and thus for adequate advice to the respective officers. Here there is the danger on the part of the officers that their rightful aristocracy degenerates into an oligarchy since, in order to safeguard their freedom of action, they may not sufficiently inform the community, or evade discussion. This may happen precisely because the community oversteps its right to advise the officer by trying to turn expressed opinions into actual mandates. It is his duty to listen seriously to every opinion and advice. He is free to choose whether and how he will make use of it in his actions. We can see how the difficulties and their avoidance feed on each other.

"To sacrifice freedom for the sake of a higher freedom," Rudolf Steiner once pronounced as a motto for spiritually responsible human collaboration. Without this, a true republic—or perhaps we may now dare to call it—a proper aristo-democracy, is impossible. In the daily striving to make the necessary sacrifices on both sides, a rhythmical center-sphere is established. On the side of the "demos": to accept the actions of the "aristoi" as part of their chosen destinies and thus support them; on the side of the "aristoi": to accept the "demos" as their organ of consciousness. This creates that middle sphere of rhythm wherein the ego of the community may achieve its heartbeat. And the atmosphere engendered by frank consideration of mutual interest becomes such, that the community organism may develop a healthy breathing.