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NNA-N E W S

Members approve fusion plans for anthroposophical societies

Dornach, 18 November (NNA) - Members attending the extraordinary general meetings last weekend of the General Anthroposophical Society (GAS) and the recently reactivated General Anthroposophical Society (Christmas Conference) at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, have approved the plan to merge the GAS with the so-called Christmas Conference Society.

A clear majority of the almost 650 members present from all over the world had expressed their confidence in the executive councils of the two societies by a clear majority, the GAS said in a statement. The members of the GAS council also comprise the Christmas Conference Society council.

In the key vote approving the merger, 531 members voted in favour of the move with 91 against. The vote authorising the executive councils to decide on the most appropriate time for the fusion to take place - to take account of pending legal actions - was carried by 539 votes to 75.

"The meetings have shown that members want the anthroposophical society to have a clear constitution and identity," the GAS said in its statement

Speaking on behalf of the executive councils, Paul Mackay said: "We are pleased with the outcome of the votes and the confidence of the members they express.

"Only a healthy constitutional basis can truly serve the future development of the Anthroposophical Society and make it relevant to a wider public," he told NNA.

In remarks in advance of the extraordinary general meetings, Mackay stressed that the executive councils had wanted to hold the meetings now to give members "the opportunity to express their will with regard to our proposals as an executive council and if what we have proposed is really supported."

The extraordinary general meetings were able to go ahead after a last-ditch procedural legal challenge by opponents of the fusion was rejected by the Dorneck-Thierstein municipal court. The substantive hearing challenging the fusion plans will take place early next year.

Commenting on the outcome of the weekend meetings, Robert Jan Kelder, representing the opposition group that took that action, promised further legal steps: "We are considering mounting a legal challenge to the decisions made last weekend."

He added: "We are currently talking to lawyers about the precise grounds on which such an action could be undertaken." One approach, he suggested, might be to assert moral rights as they relate to Rudolf Steiner.

"We claim that these constitutional plans are not in the best interests of anthroposophists and do not follow the intentions of Rudolf Steiner," he said.

Another claim made by opponents of recent constitutional developments is that the majority of members worldwide were given insufficient notice of meetings if at all. "A society has been dissolved without the majority of members being notified of this. This will probably be a major point also in the forthcoming legal actions," Kelder said.

The dispute over the fusion plans has been ongoing since March 2002, when the council of the General Anthroposophical Society announced its far-reaching constitutional plans to restructure the society with the intention of resolving long-standing issues connected with its disputed constitutional status and making its legal position more transparent.

The constitutional debate revolves around the issue whether or not the society re-founded by Rudolf Steiner as the General Anthroposophical Society at the Christmas conference of 1923 to be the vehicle for the spiritual tasks of anthroposophy - the Christmas Conference Society - still legally exists or whether it disappeared through merger with the original, administrative Johannes Building Association which was also renamed the General Anthroposophical Society on 8 February 1925.

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