



CHAPTER 4

THE WORLD SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

I am convinced that nothing is more important for the social development of humanity than the foundation of such a world association of schools which would then awaken a real sense for a free cultural and spiritual life in the widest circles of people.²⁹

We must rouse an idealism that is willing to put its money purse at the service of the ideals of mankind. Anthroposophically oriented spiritual science must take hold of practical life in its thinking. Its thinking must not merely live high up in the clouds but must penetrate right down into its money purse.³⁰
– Rudolf Steiner

“Nothing more important for the social development of humanity” are indeed powerful words, considering Steiner’s ideals and all the activities that he was engaged in up to the time of this statement in 1921, only four years before his death. It is not possible to understand the true mission of Waldorf education without taking into consideration Steiner’s efforts to launch such a world-wide association, even though it never came into being. As mentioned already, Rudolf Steiner was ever on the lookout for ways to financially support not only the Waldorf School but also other anthroposophically related endeavors.

Steiner soon saw that in order for the many worthwhile endeavors to grow and new ones to emerge, a widespread effort to raise funds on an ongoing basis was urgently needed. Beginning in July 1920, and for nearly two years thereafter, he promoted the idea

of a World School Association (*Weldschulverein* in German, also translated as World Fellowship of Schools). He saw the proposed international association having three main tasks:

1. To centralize the fundraising and disbursements of monetary gifts for anthroposophical causes.

Steiner thought a centralized fund would be helpful to overcome the fundraising competition that was beginning to occur amongst the various anthroposophical endeavors. He also hoped a centralized organization could establish broad-based support far beyond what each organization could do individually and locally. He explained this to the teachers at the Waldorf School on July 29, 1920.

*My idea was to centralize the entire financial organization. We want a central financial organization so that all money donated for anthroposophical use will go to one central organization. ... The intention was to have all the money we receive go into a unified central fund and then be distributed according to what is needed.*³¹

2. To create new and immediate additional income streams for the Waldorf School in Stuttgart and for the completion of the first Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

Steiner saw the establishment of a World School Association as the most important social activity one could engage in at the time. He was hoping that a huge movement would spread rapidly over the whole world that could quickly raise funds for anthroposophical endeavors.

People ask how much money one needs for all this. One cannot say how much, because there never is an uppermost limit. ... It will be possible to establish this World [School Association] ... if the friends who are about to go to Norway or Sweden or Holland, or any other country—England, France, America, and so on—awaken in every human being whom they can reach the well-founded conviction that there has to be a World [School Association]. It ought to go through the world

*like wildfire that a World [School Association] must arise to provide the material means for the spiritual culture that is intended here.*³²

3. To influence public opinion by promoting the idea of educational and cultural freedom to the broader public.

Steiner felt it was essential to influence public opinion in order to create a climate in which laws could be introduced and supported that were in favor of independent schools. He wanted to counter the trend of ever-increasing government control over education. Knowing that the teachers of the Waldorf School had more than enough to do teaching and administering schools, he encouraged others to become active in the threefold movement. The two things he did encourage the teachers to do were to write and speak out of direct experience about their achievements in the school. In other words, let the world know what independent teachers and schools can accomplish.

Ultimately the Waldorf school movement has meaning only to the degree that it strives for cultural freedom. Steiner connected the idea of freedom from state control with raising the requisite money required to operate independent schools.

*A movement can free itself from [the root causes of sectarianism] if it will stand up to the world, fully within the laws of the land, so that there can be no confusion with regard to the legal aspects. And this is what I had in mind with regard to the World School Movement. I wished to create the right mood for the introduction of laws which would grant freedom to found schools entirely out of the needs for educational renewal. Schools can never be rightly founded out of majority decisions. This is why they cannot be run by the state.*³³

I am convinced that nothing is more important for the social development of humanity than the foundation of such a world association of schools which would then awaken a real sense for a free cultural and spiritual life in the widest circles of people. If such a feeling were to exist

*throughout the world, Waldorf schools would not have to be founded as isolated experiments that exist by the grace of the State, but the State would then be compelled, where free cultural life really founds schools, to recognize these schools on their own account, without having to make this or the other stipulation.*³⁴

[W]e need a really practical attitude. This is lacking if those who are enthused about the ideas of the Waldorf School do not develop an understanding for the necessity of spreading the idea that schools must become independent of the state—if they do not employ their forces to bring about the liberation of the schools from the state. If you do not have the courage to strive for the liberation of the schools from the state, the whole Waldorf School Movement is of no avail. For it has meaning only if this movement grows into a free spiritual life.

*For all this, we need what I should like to call an international endeavor, an international endeavor that does not merely go out into the world spreading principles as to how schools are to be established. This will take care of itself if, above everything else, money is made available for such schools. We need a World School Association in all civilized countries in order to make available as quickly as possible the greatest amount of means. On the basis of these means, it will be possible to create the beginning of a free spiritual life. Therefore, try, wherever you go, to work for the understanding of the freedom of the spiritual life, not merely through all kinds of “idealistic” endeavors; but work for understanding which will bring it about that to the greatest possible extent money becomes available for the erection of independent schools and independent colleges in the world.*³⁵

Much to his distress, his contemporaries failed to grasp the vital importance of liberating education for the sake of human evolution and the necessity of having sufficient funds to work toward that ideal. The necessary conviction was not there to fire the will. By 1922, Steiner openly declared that his efforts to stimulate interest in a World School Association were a failure. It was a bitter admission for him to make because he was convinced that if the necessary

conviction and will had lived strongly enough in the hearts of his listeners the money would have flowed in abundantly! At times Steiner expressed himself in terms of frustration and outright anger when referring to the failure of people to grasp what was at stake and what needed to be done.

When the attempt was made to accomplish the deed of founding the World School Association as our only means of expanding beyond Central Europe, this attempt failed. It was to have encompassed the entire civilized world. The attempt to rouse whatever belief people had that the educational system must change, which was what was being attempted in the World School Association, was a miserable fiasco. There is such a terrible feeling of being rebuffed when you appeal to the will. I do not say that I am appealing for money in this case. We are lacking in money, but we are lacking in will to a much greater extent. The interest that exists does not go very deep, otherwise it would extend to the right areas. ...

I am trying to speak today in a way that awakens enthusiasm, so that people feel the spiritual blood trickling in their souls and a large number of people who realize this will commit themselves, so that public opinion is aroused. Actually, I must say that at any point in the last twenty years when I tried to speak a language that appealed to people's hearts not only in a theoretical sense but to the heart as an organ of will, what I felt, first in the Anthroposophical Society and later in other groups, always made me wonder, "Don't people have ears?" It seemed that people could not hear things that were supposed to move from words to action. The experience of the fiasco of the World School Association was enough to drive one to despair. ...

In order to maintain the Waldorf School and establish additional schools, we need a growing public conviction that continuing in the sense of the old school system will lead only to forces of decline within humanity. This conviction is what we need. ...

Please excuse me, but in a certain respect I really cannot avoid saying that I know many people will recognize the truth in what I have

just said, but you only really acknowledge the truth of something by doing something about it! By doing something about it! ... We must try to work for ideas and ideals so that an ever-growing number of people are imbued with them.

If all the money that people spend today on unnecessary associations could be directed into our channels, then ... [our treasurer] would have to report that our reserve is so large that we have to try to invest it fruitfully.

I do not believe at all that the main thing for us today is our lack of money. What we are lacking is the will to assert ourselves in real life, to insist that the portion of spiritual life that we acknowledge as true be given its due in the world.

The will to convince everyone must be present in an ever-increasing number of people. In addition, the conviction must become widespread that for the salvation of humanity, it is necessary for something such as is present in embryonic form in the Waldorf School to keep on growing.

That is what I wanted to have said to the percentage of hearts in which the impulse of will is present. We can get very far if we only think about what it depends on: It depends on us using our will to really get public opinion to where it ought to be.³⁶

It is interesting to note that even though he considered the creation of a World School Association to be so important for the proper growth of the Waldorf School Movement and the salvation of humanity, Steiner considered the effort to be a compromise in the way one should ideally go expanding independent school education.

So much about the planned World School Movement, an idea which in itself does not at all appeal to me. ... All propaganda-making, all agitating is alien to me. I abhor these things. But if one's hands are tied and if there is no possibility to found free schools, one first has to create the right climate for ideas which may eventually lead to freedom in education. Compromises may well be justified in various instances, but we are living in times in which each compromise is likely to pull us still further into difficulties.³⁷