



CHAPTER 6

PRIVATE FUNDING: WHY AND HOW

Independent education, like all education, needs to be financed with an ongoing stream of money. The logical next question is: How is it possible to obtain the amount of money required in such a way that a school can retain its freedom and still be accessible to students of all economic backgrounds? As we have learned, Steiner tried a number of ways to develop multiple private-sector income streams for the first Waldorf school. He had hoped these would eventually develop into a steady river of support, but there never seemed to be enough money.

It was inevitable that the question of government support for independent schools should arise in relation to Waldorf education. In 1917, two years prior to the founding of the first Waldorf school, Holland passed a law that provided for government financial support of private schools. During a discussion period after a lecture in 1922, a teacher asked Rudolf Steiner about starting a Waldorf school in Holland with government subsidies. Steiner rejected the idea because he felt that a state subsidized-school could not remain free of government control.

Questioner: According to Dutch law it is possible to found a free school, if the government is satisfied of the serious and genuine intentions behind such an impulse. If we in Holland were unable to raise the necessary capital for founding a Waldorf school, would it be right for us to accept state subsidies, as long as we were allowed to arrange our curriculum and our lessons according to Waldorf principles?

Rudolf Steiner: There is one part of the question I do not understand, and another which fills me with doubts. What I cannot understand is that in Holland it should not be possible to get enough money together for a really free school. Forgive me if I am naïve, but I do not understand it. For I believe that, if there is enough enthusiasm, it should at least be possible to start such a school. After all, not so very much money is needed to start a school.

The other point which seems dubious to me is that it should be possible to run a [free] school with the aid of State subsidies. For I very much doubt whether the government, if it pays out money for such a school, would not insist on the right to inspect it. Therefore I cannot believe that a free school could be founded with State subsidies which in themselves imply supervision by inspectors of the education authorities.⁴⁴

Steiner did acknowledge that it was appropriate for the State to take over the provision of education from the various religions for a period of time to allow for the development of human freedom. But he also maintained that to persist in this arrangement poses a grave threat to human culture.⁴⁵ The democratic principles of equality and majority rule are no longer appropriate in matters of education where individual perspectives and choices should hold sway. Steiner maintained, therefore, that financial support for education should come directly from the economy by way of individuals and organizations, and not be detoured through the state, where it would be subject to majority rule (or worse yet, powerful interest groups).

One might then think: If the state, through its coercive powers, no longer pays the teachers what they need, then it would go badly for the teachers. But the teachers will belong to an economic corporation, similar to other economic corporations. Along with being teachers they will also be members of the third aspect of the threefold social organism (the economic aspect), and will receive salaries from that independent economic system. The threefold social organism will have an independent economic body, just as it has an independent legal body that will democratically take care of legal matters. Similarly, it will also have a

*free spiritual realm. What today goes into the pockets of teachers indirectly through taxes will, in the future, come directly from the economic life. Apart from that, a free spiritual life will foster the appropriate atmosphere for schools and teaching.*⁴⁶

He described once how he was chided by a person in the audience following one of his lectures because of this position. The person asserted that the poor German people could not afford to fund education and that the State was the only source of the large amount of money required. In response, Steiner pointed out that the State does not generate wealth. Therefore, even the State would have to rely on the economy of the poor nation as the source of funds.

I was answered in the discussion at the end of a lecture by a secondary school teacher, somewhat in this wise: "We Germans shall be a poor nation in the future, and here is a man who wants to make the spiritual and intellectual life independent; a poor people cannot pay for that, there will be no money, therefore we shall have to draw on the national exchequer and pay for education out of the taxes. What becomes of independence then? How can we refuse the right of the State to inspect, when the State is the source of income?"

*I could only reply that it seemed strange to me for the teacher to believe that what was drawn from the Treasury as taxes grew there somehow or other, and would not in the future come out of the pocket of the "poor nation." What strikes me most is the lack of thought everywhere. We need to develop a real practical thinking which sees into the facts of life. That will give us practical suggestions which can be carried out.*⁴⁷

Although he agreed that all children have a right to an education, Steiner considered the so-called tuition free school—public or private—a social lie. In reality, some person, or group, must have amassed the capital to fund schools either privately or through taxes. In either case, the purse holder controls the education.

Throughout the land today you hear the cry for schooling free of charge. What does this really imply? But the cry throughout the land should be: How can we get a form of socialism in which everyone is

*enabled to contribute in the right way towards educational affairs? Free schooling is nothing less than a social lie, for behind this is hidden either the fact that surplus value finds its way into the pockets of a small set of people who then found a school and thus gain mastery over others; or sand is strewn in the eyes of the public so that they should not realize that among the coins they take from their purse there must be some that go to the upkeep of schools. In all that we say, in the very shaping of our sentences, we must conscientiously strive after truth.*⁴⁸

From a threefold perspective, the right to an education means that a family has the financial means to have its children educated in the school or program of its choice. “The necessary capital must be provided ... for the education of those who are not yet productive. ... The education and support of those who are incapable of working is something which concerns all humanity, and through a rights-state detached from the economy, it will be so. ...”⁴⁹ How does one make sure that there are sufficient funds for the education of all children without education being subjected to outside control?

Steiner suggests two approaches. One is through adjusting or augmenting a person’s income if he or she has school-age children. This could be introduced to a certain degree through various legal measures connected to wage laws. Another possibility is that the State would require that sufficient money be set aside by the economy for education—perhaps into education funds or foundations—and would also determine who would be eligible to access the funds (establishing student age limits and family income requirements, for example). The point is that the money does not pass through the government, but the State does ensure that sufficient funds are available to those who need them. Although it appears that we are a long way off from such arrangements, there are social movements in harmony with these ideas that could be strengthened, such as privately-funded voucher programs and the universal living wage movement.

Before going further in our exploration of Waldorf education, we will now give a brief overview of government education reform in the United States since the early 1980s. The reason for this apparent digression is to understand how completely contrary these reform efforts are to the ideals of educational freedom and the threefold social organism, and to highlight the necessity for Waldorf education to reconnect to its original social mission of leading a movement for true educational freedom. Whereas it is time for government and business to be withdrawing from the control of education, it will be shown that for the last twenty or more years big business and the federal and state governments in the United States have pushed for a uniform, centrally-controlled, nationalized educational system. In so doing, these interests often use alluring terms to support their goals and actions such as parental choice, educational freedom, diversity, and local control. However, their way of characterizing and implementing these actions are a distortion of truth. After reviewing this sharp contrast to the social mission of Waldorf education, we will once again return to our central theme of independence, private funding, and accessibility for independent schools.