



## CHAPTER 5

### INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-ADMINISTRATION

Newcomers to Waldorf schools are often confused by the schools' administrative structures. Typically, there is no easily-seen authority figure directing the operations, no principal as is found in public schools, nor a headmaster or headmistress as found in traditional independent schools. Rather, the newcomers are confronted with titles and explanations of leadership positions and governance systems in terms of mandated committees, coordinators, facilitators, faculty chairs, and the college of teachers or teachers' council. Before giving a description of what Rudolf Steiner called a "republic of teachers," which is the basis for this unusual division of labor and of administrative functions, we will give the reasons for such an approach.

Below are five quotations by Rudolf Steiner from various written sources and lectures. They are given so the reader can grasp the context in which Steiner always spoke of school administration. While the material presented has redundancies, it also has subtleties and nuances that are helpful in understanding the full context and import of the principle of self-administration for an independent school. The repetition of certain thoughts expressed also shows that they are fundamental rather than isolated ideas. Steiner's indications regarding a teacher-run, self-administered school on a republican basis are meaningless unless they are understood in relation to the striving for educational freedom. Readers can gain considerable insight into the social mission of Waldorf education by meditatively contemplating the totality of these statements.

*The nature which spiritual [cultural] life has assumed requires that it constitute a fully autonomous member of the social organism. The administration of education, from which all culture develops, must be turned over to the educators. Economic and political considerations should be entirely excluded from this administration. Each teacher should arrange his or her time so that he can also be an administrator in his field. He should be just as much at home attending to administrative matters as he is in the classroom. No one should make decisions who is not directly engaged in the educational process. No parliament or congress, nor any individual who was perhaps once an educator is to have anything to say. What is experienced in the teaching process would then flow naturally into administration.<sup>38</sup>*

*The threefold [organism] strives to realize an independent life of thought, especially in ... everything relating to education and the manner of giving instruction, that is, the State shall no longer determine the matter and manner of teaching. Only those who are actually teachers, engaged in practical education, shall be its administrators. This means that from the lowest class ... up to the highest grade of education, the teacher shall be independent of any political or economic authority as regards the subject or manner of his teaching. This is a natural consequence of a feeling for what is appropriate to the life of thought within the independent cultural body. The individual need only spend so much time in imparting instruction as will leave him leisure to collaborate in the work of education as a whole and the sphere of spiritual and cultural life.<sup>39</sup>*

*[T]he movement for the threefold social [organism] strives for the complete dissociation of the educational system from government and industry. The place and function of educators within society should depend solely upon the authority of those engaged in this activity. The administration of the educational institutions, the organization of courses of instruction and their goals should be entirely in the hands of persons who themselves are simultaneously either teaching or otherwise productively engaged in cultural life. In each case, such persons would*

*divide their time between actual teaching (or some other form of cultural productivity) and the administrative control of the educational system. It will be evident to anyone who can bring himself to an unbiased examination of cultural life that the peculiar vitality and energy of soul required for organizing and directing educational institutions will be called forth only in someone actively engaged in teaching or in some sort of cultural creativity.<sup>40</sup>*

*The pedagogical and didactic teaching of the Waldorf School should receive its impulse from a true spiritual scientific understanding of people. ...*

*[W]e must build all pedagogical art on a knowledge of the soul that is closely tied to the personality of the teacher. This personality must be able to freely express itself in pedagogical creativity. That, however, is possible only if the entire administration of the school system is autonomous, if practicing teachers need to deal only with other practicing teachers in administrative questions. An educator not actively teaching would be just as much out of place in the school administration as a person without artistic creativity would be in giving directions to creative artists. The nature of the pedagogical art requires that the faculty divide its time between teaching and administering the school. The spirit formed out of the attitude of all teachers united in an educating community thus comes to full effect in the administration. In this community only what comes from a recognition, an understanding, of the soul will have value.*

*Such a community is possible only in the Threefold Social Organism, which has a free cultural life alongside a democratically oriented state and an independent economic life. ... A cultural life that receives its directives from the political bureaucracy or from the forces of economic life cannot take care of a school whose impulse derives solely from the faculty.<sup>41</sup>*

*You might have been wondering which kind of people would make good teachers in a [Waldorf] school. They are people whose entire lives have been molded by the spiritual knowledge of which I spoke. ...*

*Those who believe in the anthroposophical way of life must insist on a free and independent cultural-spiritual life. This represents one of the three branches of the threefold social [organism]. ... One of the demands that must be made for spiritual life—something that is not at all utopian, that may be begun any day—is that those actively engaged in spiritual life (and this means, above all, those involved in its most important public domain, namely education) should also be entrusted with all administrative matters, and this in a broad and comprehensive way.*

*The maximum number of lessons to be taught—plus the hours spent on other educational commitments—should allow teachers sufficient time for regular meetings, in both smaller and larger groups, to deal with administrative matters. However, only practicing teachers—not former teachers now holding state positions or retired teachers—should be called on to care for this side of education. For what has to be administered in each particular school—as in all institutions belonging to the spiritual-cultural life—should be only a continuation of what is being taught, of what forms the content of every word spoken and every deed performed in the classroom. Rules and regulations must not be imposed from outside the school. In spiritual life, autonomy, self-administration, is essential.<sup>42</sup>*

The cardinal ideas within, and which can be deduced from, these quotations are:

- The Waldorf teaching methods are developed out of a spiritual-scientific knowledge of the human being, including the soul-spiritual aspect of the child. Rightly considered, this knowledge becomes a part of the personality of the teacher, who must be able to work freely and creatively in relation to the students. This can occur only if schools are not directed by the State in matters of content and manner of teaching. Therefore, school administration, including curriculum, goals, and standards,

need to be completely removed from State control. (See Chapter 16 for appropriate relation of the state to schooling.)

- The educational system and the rest of cultural life should constitute an independent branch of social life with its own administration and governance system. Education is the primary value-forming aspect of culture, out of which all culture—science, art, and religion—evolves.
- School administration, as expressed here, should be viewed in a broad and comprehensive manner to include the whole educational system at all levels from nursery programs to the highest level of universities and trade schools. When speaking of administration, Steiner does not speak solely about individual schools but rather about the entire educational system. Steiner's indications regarding self-administration gain meaning only when they are viewed in the context of the movement for independent education and a threefold social organism.
- To preclude any possibility of outside interference of the educational system by political and economic forces, only active teachers or other cultural workers should be making administrative decisions. Teachers' workloads should not only allow them the time to participate in administration in a particular school but also the administering of the whole educational system and cultural life.
- Administration should be an extension and reflection of what takes place and arises out of the classroom rather than the life of the classroom being shaped by an administration subordinate to political and economic forces.
- Teachers should be as capable in administrative matters as they are in the classroom. A community of educators will arise out of the dynamics of an administration of the educational system based on the understanding and recognition of the soul. This community of educators will oversee the goals and standards of education.

In keeping with the principle of freedom and individual responsibility, Steiner instituted what he called the republican approach to administration. He described this approach to the new teachers just before the launching of the first Waldorf school as follows:

*Two opposite forces have to be harmonized in the course of our work. On the one hand we must know what our ideals are [pedagogical and social], yet we must be flexible enough to adapt ourselves to things that are far removed from our ideals. The difficult task of harmonizing these two forces stands before each of you. And you will only achieve this if you engage all the forces of your personality. Each of you will have to put your whole personality into it right from the start.*

*The school, therefore, will have its own administration run on a republican basis and will not be administered from above. We must not lean back and rest securely on the orders of a headmaster; we must be a republic of teachers and kindle in ourselves the strength that will enable us to do what we have to do with full responsibility. Each one of you, as an individual, has to be fully responsible.<sup>43</sup>*

There are two aspects of the modern concept of *republican* relevant to a Waldorf school. First, all members are considered equals, and second, the ultimate ruling body (the carrying teachers in the case of a Waldorf school) has the power to elect or appoint representatives to take on specific duties on their behalf. Steiner wanted the teachers to be jointly responsible for the decision-making and administrative execution of decisions with the full weight of their personalities. In a modern Waldorf school this translates for the most part into a faculty-run governance system, mandated committees, and appointed administrators headed by a faculty council or college of teachers.

Without going immediately into the actual challenges and problems that often occur in Waldorf schools trying to work out of the republican approach, we can already deduce the following from Steiner's perspective on administration:

- 1) If teachers are to feel just as much at home in administration as they are in teaching, and have the proper understanding of administration in a broad and comprehensive way in harmony with the ideals of social threefolding, then all three areas—pedagogy, social threefolding, including educational freedom, and administration—would need to be given equal emphasis in teacher-training institutes and programs.
  
- 2) In order for teachers to have time to deal with administrative matters, sufficient funds in the school budget would be necessary to keep work loads at an appropriate level.

In a later chapter we will review some of the more obvious problems that have occurred in the administrative areas of Waldorf schools.