

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE A.A. ORGANIZATION

May 16, 1994

It may seem presumptuous to question anything that Bill Wilson wrote. His thoughts about the Principles and philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous leave little room for argument but some of his points concerning organization reflect his business background and professional training and do not correspond with the spiritual democratic society that he professed to support.

These points concerning organization appear in the Concepts. In some of his descriptions of A.A.'s world structure he contradicts his own perceptions and beliefs.

When Dr. Bob Smith was alive it would appear that most of the material introduced had been at least passed by him for his advice or approval. His review of Bill's works had a mellowing effect but after he died Nov. 16, 1950, his hand was no longer felt.

The two Legacies, Recovery and Unity, the Steps and the Traditions respectively, were brought forth when the two founders were alive. Even the General Service Conference which came into existence in April, 1951, had received Dr. Bob's blessing before he died.

However, the Concepts were published in 1962 and were written after Dr. Bob's demise. They reflected events which occurred when Dr. Bob was alive but were Bill's views of what happened, not Dr. Bob's.

In Bill's Introduction to the Concepts he states "Unforeseen flaws in the present structure will doubtless show up later on".

There are flaws showing up which have had some serious effects on the direction in which A.A. has gone.

The flaws are basic and indicate contradictions in Bill's philosophy concerning the goals and purposes of the Fellowship.

On Page 74 which is the very last page of the Concepts it states "The sum of these several attitudes and practices is, in our view, the very essence of democracy - in action and spirit."

It is "the essence of democracy - in action and spirit" which has gone off track.

The Concepts have gone to great lengths from the very first one to give final authority to the groups and members. The

Manual of Service on page 523 shows an organization chart with the groups at the top and the Trustees at the bottom. This is the reverse of organizations such as the Army, the Church and big Corporations. It has given the impression that A.A. is the ultimate democracy.

Concept II delegates this authority and responsibility to the General Service Conference.

Concept III gives the "Right of Decision" to the Delegates who represent the groups at the Conference.

In Concept VI the Conference gives "the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters" to the Trustees of the General Service Board.

These statements in the Concepts are in keeping with A.A. philosophy.

But let us take a look at some other statements in Concept VI:

"We should quite understand, too, that the conduct of our world services is primarily a matter of Policy and business. Of course our objective is always a spiritual one, but this service aim can only be achieved by means of an effective business operation.".....

"This is the basic corporate concept on which our structure of world service rests. We have deliberately chosen the corporate form ".....

"From top to bottom, our whole service structure indeed resembles that of a large corporation."

And this is exactly what has happened.

A.A./has been based on the corporate form rather than the democratic form.

In spite of the fact that in Concept I Bill encouraged the idea of a spiritualized society with democratic ideals, in Concept VI he flatly stated he had "deliberately chosen the corporate form".

In support of the idea of a spiritualized society with democratic ideals, the manual entitled The Third Legacy of Service, established an organization chart which was completely reversed to that of normal organizations. It showed the groups at the top which implied the ultimate democracy.

The Third Legacy Manual was written when the General Service Conference was established in 1951. The name was changed to

the "A.A. Service Manual" in 1969. It was published before the Concepts so it can be seen that Bill wanted the groups to be seen at the top of the organization chart from the inception of the Conference.

Clearly Bill had the idealistic intention of A.A. being a democratic Fellowship which would be distinct from other Societies.

However, when he applied his own background and experience as a lawyer, an officer in the Army, and a stockbroker who had taken over corporations in proxy deals spiritual democracy deferred to expediency.

Bill had been the founder and charismatic leader of this association from its beginning. Even though Dr. Bob was the other founder, most of the direction and details were left to Bill. Dr. Bob died after fifteen years. The General Service Conference was started after A.A. had been in existence for 16 years virtually totally under Bill's control.

Bill had been the prime instigator of the General Service Conference. Obviously in his heart and mind he considered it the best for the Society but when push came to shove and he realized his "baby" was no longer in his hands it seemed that he began to have reservations. He was not really prepared for the outcome of turning the running of his "baby" over to the Fellowship. He wanted to retain the control at Headquarters Just like any corporate entity.

The democracy he had originally envisaged required some strings. The result was that Bill in Concept VI contradicted his original statements and opted for the corporate model.

A corporate model can never be a true democracy. A corporation attempts to retain control of its affairs through its Headquarters executive or staff. There is no intention of providing a democracy which has the purpose of following the wishes of its members unless they correspond with those of the Headquarters.

There is a very definite indication of this kind of reasoning as a footnote on page 20 of the Concepts: "There is another very practical reason for not giving Conference Delegates absolute voting authority over trustees, service directors, and staff members. It should be borne in mind that our delegates can never be like a Congress in constant session Our delegates cannot possibly function in this manner for the simple reason that they meet for a few days only, once a year".

This was not Part of Bill's essay. It is an editorial note to support someone else's rationalization.

But it should be pointed out that the 91 Conference Delegates do have voting control since they have 2/3's of the members. However, in actual practice they have never all voted together on anything.

There is some validity to the statement that they meet for a few days only. But it does not address all the parts of the problem.

Alcoholics Anonymous is not a democracy in the sense of representation by population. Nevertheless it should have wide representation of its population if it is to do what Bill said he wanted initially, that is to give the ultimate authority and responsibility to the groups with the groups at the top of the organization.

In the footnote to the Concepts it states that the delegates do not have the same knowledge as the Headquarters staff and they don't.

But they do have more knowledge than the staff of what is happening in their own areas.

"Our common welfare should come first, personal recovery depends on A.A. unity". In order to have unity we have to have knowledge of what the members and groups think as a whole.

There is also another implication in this footnote regarding self-interest:

"This is all the more reason for allowing the sometimes better informed minority of trustees and Headquarters people the balloting privilege in all cases where no self-interest is involved".

The Trustees have no self-interest nor do the Delegates. The H.O. staff have self-interest because it is their policies which are being considered in many instances. They do not rotate the same as the rest of the Conference members. As voting members they can pursue policies as long as they are employees.

Bill Wilson had created the General Service Conference because he could see where his own self interests were involved when he was the Founder and leader at Headquarters.

The implication here is that Trustees, service directors and staff members are the same. They are not. Staff are like civil servants. They are employees who remain on the job for as long as they choose or at least as long as they perform their duties adequately. They help to determine policy whether the policy reflects the views of those they are serving or not. Because they are employees and some have been

there for long periods their views often are different from the current delegates and trustees.

The 91 Delegates and 10 of the Trustees are elected by the membership.

The elected people are the ones who most closely reflect the current views of the membership. Civil servants often have views that reflect the ideas of some earlier group of Delegates which may not necessarily represent the views of the present body. The elected people should be permitted to make their decisions after listening to the information provided by the civil servants without giving the additional advantage of such servants being able to vote as an opposition if this be their choice.

But civil servants should not be voting when they have already had input. They are the Headquarters. Their influence is out of all proportion. They cannot by their numbers outvote the rest of the body but they have a block which has weight and provides pressure for a Headquarters control. The story is that they never vote all together but there is no question that they have a common understanding.

Another quote from Bill in Concept Iv: "There is another good reason for "Participation" and this one has to do with our spiritual needs It is our shining ideal that the "spiritual corporation" of A.A. should never include any members who are regarded as "second class".

Bill seems to have missed the point that these people at Headquarters by having a vote at the Conference have in essence put the rest of A.A. in the position of being "second class". They are in their positions longer than anyone else, have collected and collated all the information that comes in from the field, have to a great extent collectively determined the direction in which A.A. will go and then they vote on the issues which they have helped to formulate.

All the alcoholics at Headquarters have further input in the fact that they have votes at their own groups. They "Participate" above and beyond everyone else.

With the growth of A.A. and the increase of employees at the General Service Office there are approximately another 25 employees who attend the Conference who do not have a vote. Many of them are non-alcoholics and do not even get a vote through their groups. These people in Bill's terms are really "second class".

TRUSTEES

Ten of the Trustees have been delegates before becoming Trustees so have a knowledgeable background.

Four Trustees are called General Service Trustees and more about these later. Seven Trustees are non-alcoholics who come in with specialized knowledge. Because of our Anonymity tradition they are essential to represent us at high profile functions. They also can provide an objective viewpoint which is often required in this Fellowship.

The Trustees act as a Cabinet in Government and should always be allowed to vote.

STAFF

As stated previously, in my opinion, the staff employees have more input to the process than anyone else. To permit them to vote at the General Service Conference gives them a preferred status out of all proportion to the rest of A.A.

They do not deliberately establish policy nor focus the direction for A.A. to follow but indirectly they cannot help but do so. Their positions at the General Service Office and their links to the members of the Fellowship determine much of the policy and always will.

GENERAL SERVICE TRUSTEES

General Service Trustees were created to provide expertise to the staff and the Board. Originally there was a small group of people doing the work at the General Service Office. Many were volunteers and part time staff. As time has gone by the payroll of the staff for A.A.W.S. and the Grapevine has grown to around five million dollars. It would seem with this kind of money it should no longer be necessary to have any more than the staff to perform the duties.

The services of the General Service Trustees, therefore, can be dispensed with.

There are also six non-trustee Directors, three with A.A.W.S. and three with the Grapevine from whom the General Service Trustees are picked. If the General Service Trustees are no longer required, neither are the non-trustee Directors.

ROTATION

Rotation should probably be discussed here because it was built into the democracy

Delegates serve for two years. Half the delegates change in alternate years so there is always half who have had some experience. The alcoholic (Class B) Trustees stay for four years which provides additional experience while the nonalcoholic (Class A) Trustees stay for six years which gives them a little more time to get some practical knowledge of A.A.

The 91 Delegates, 8 regional Trustees and 2 Trustees-at-large have an election process by the membership. This has gradually evolved over time. Therefore, 101 members of the Conference are representatives of the groups.

Some format could probably be developed to have the 7 non-alcoholic Trustees go through an election Process.

The General Service Trustees change every 4 years but the process by which they move up to Trustees permits them to serve at the General Service Office for 4 years on a committee, 4 years as a Director on one of the 2 Boards, that is, A.A.W.S. or Grapevine, and 4 years as Trustee, which gives them up to 12 years with direct involvement at Headquarters.

At no time have they been elected by a process involving the membership other than being approved by the Conference. Since they were initially required for their expertise at Headquarters and since there is now a staff earning approximately \$5,000,000. a year there should no longer be a need for their services.

The staff rotate only by changing jobs every two years. Because they remain at Headquarters indefinitely by reason of their employment and are allowed to vote at the Conference they have become a "preferred" group.

With time the Staff have become corporate Headquarters. They influence the whole democratic process and in so doing defeat ".....the very essence of democracy - in action and spirit".

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For some time there has been an unwritten intention to keep the General Service Conference at its present level of participants. that is, about 134. This means that the number of delegates and areas must remain about 91 in order to provide the 2/3 majority.

The numbers currently are:

- 91 Delegates
- 21 Trustees
- 6 Directors

16 Staff

134 Total

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91 Delegates are elected by the membership from the areas
8 Trustees are elected by the regions
2 Trustees are "at large" and elected by the membership

101 members of the Conference are elected essentially by membership.

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7 Trustees - non-alcoholics approved by the Conference
4 Trustees - alcoholics - known as General Service Trustees
approved by the Conference
6 Directors approved by the Conference

17 members of the Conference are approved by the Conference
They are not elected by the membership

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16 members of the staff are voting members. They are not elected by
the membership nor approved by the Conference.

The 101 elected from the membership plus the 7 non-alcoholic Trustees
are vital to the voting process.

This leaves 26 who could be eliminated:

- 4 General Service Trustees
- 6 Directors
- 16 Staff.

26 Total

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Further analysis

| Year | Membership U.S. & Canada | Delegates |
|------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1951 | 90.550 | 37 |
| 1952 | 92,102 | 75 |
| 1962 | 122,477 | 85 |
| 1973 | 244.426 | 91 Area in Cue. added. |

Another quote from the Concepts written by Bill which may have a direct bearing on some of his words in the Concepts: "But most of the actual responsibility for the conduct of A.A.'s Headquarters nevertheless fell on me, my assistant and her staff. On the one hand we had Trustees who possessed complete authority and on the other hand there were founders and office managers who had great responsibility but practically no authority".

At this point Bill had turned or was intending to turn, the Fellowship over to the General Service Conference. The members of the Conference, Delegates and Trustees, were taking over the "founders" duties. What was happening was that Bill was finding that no longer was he in the driver's seat as he had prior to the formation of the General Service Conference. He was probably finding it difficult to let go.

Whether he did this deliberately or not, consciously or unconsciously, an organization was put in place to retain control of the Fellowship at Headquarters as much as possible but still with the appearance of a democratic society.

Although Bill had established the General Service Conference the results were hard to accept. No longer was he the "founder" in the sense that everybody referred everything to him. A.A. was no longer his baby. The Conference and the Trustees were now "in charge".

In order to retain at least some semblance of his former means of influence his background and business experience encouraged him to use the corporate model which he rationalized as a form of democracy.

Shortly after the publishing of the Concepts there was a radical change in the people on the General Service Board. The General Service Conference passed an Advisory Action in 1966 to have the Board consist of 7 non-alcoholics and 14 alcoholics. Up to this time it had consisted of a majority of non-alcoholics. The 7/14 relationship reflected the 2/3 indicated in the Third Legacy Manual to elect delegates.

This radical change in the composition of the Board was not reflected in the Concepts although changes were being considered. Some of Bill's policies might have been different if he had known that alcoholics themselves would be in the majority at the Board.

Gradual revisions were also occurring in the methods whereby Board members were being chosen. It was slowly becoming a representative body in accordance with Bill's original vision of a democracy. In Concept VII it was mentioned that "we also considered the idea of country-wide elections for all Trustees. But this procedure would have produced a political shambles rather than the top flight managerial talent the Board had to have. So that notion was abandoned."

In spite of Bill's reservations it would seem that the "corporate form" was beginning its slow dissolution. Ten of the alcoholic (Class B) Trustees are being elected by a country-wide process.

When the Concepts were published in 1962 the membership in the U.S. and Canada was approximately 122,477. It has grown to 1,231,000. Changes are required to have the views of more members represented if "the very essence of democracy - in action and spirit" is to be maintained.

No one questions the motives of the staff. They are and always have been devoted A.A. "special workers". Their lives have been sacrificed to the Fellowship.

They should not be put in the position of being seen as directing A.A.

A.A. should be directed by the General Service Conference through the Delegates and Trustees who represent the groups and members if it is to have "the essence of democracy - in action and spirit".