

Dear delegate to the 1995 General Conference Session _

Our Church is in a Crisis!

_ Please, please read this.

Both of us are believers in the Advent Message. Both of us want our Church to succeed in its God-given mission. Both of us want the best for our people as they try, in this difficult world today, to fulfill the will of God for their lives.

As a delegate to the forthcoming Utrecht General Conference Session, you are in a position to help protect our Church—more than some of the rest of us. I plead with you to please read this brief message.

FACT #1: Other delegates will tell you that Robert Folkenberg is trying to gather as much power to himself as possible. He is attempting to do this by getting the 1995 Session to pass several items which, we are sorry to say, he has used subterfuge to place on its agenda.

FACT #2: We now know that those agenda items (which Folkenberg terms the “linkage items”), when presented to the 1994 Annual Council for approval—were falsely presented to that council as coming from the Commission on World Church Organization. But that is not true! COWCO never approved those items. So many on the commission were opposed to them, that not one of those agenda items was even voted on, much less “recommended” to the Annual Council or the 1995 Session. This is a terrible fact! Both the 1994 Annual Council and the forthcoming Session delegates are being lied to! It is a shame to even have to tell you this, but the issue is so vital that we must do so.

FACT #3: Those agenda items, if enacted, will give Robert Folkenberg an immense increase of control over lower levels of the church. He will be in a position to require that under-leaders do as he says, or he will get them ousted from office. It is true that these agenda items will place more power in the hands of a few men on lower levels, but those items, if approved by the 1995 Session delegates, will give Folkenberg greater control of those lower-level leaders.

FACT #4: As fellow Seventh-day Adventist believers and members, neither you nor I want our church destroyed! Please, please vote NO on these

special agenda items.

First, we will identify these five special agenda items (which Folkenberg calls “linkage” items). Next, we will explain how we know the Commission on World Church Organization never recommended them, as purported, by Folkenberg, to the 1994 Annual Council and, in a few weeks, to the 1995 Utrecht Session.

THE FIVE CRUCIAL AGENDA ITEMS

AGENDA ITEM #1 - Clarifying General Conference officer relationships; i.e., do what you are told.

“The first proposed change in *Article VIII—Officers and their Duties*—adds a general statement at the beginning that says it is the duty of the General Conference ‘officers, in consultation with each other, to carry forward the work according to plans and programs’ set forth by the GC session and Executive Committee.

“This makes sure that the GC officers will follow what they have been asked to do by what might be called their ‘bosses.’ ”—Adventist Review, April 17, p. 17.

AGENDA ITEM #2 - Setting up a “first officer of the church”; i.e., making a king.

“The next item adds words to define clearly the relationship between the GC president and the two other executive officers (secretary and treasurer). **The proposed wording states what has not been stated before, that the president ‘is the first officer of the General Conference.’**”—*Adventist Review, April 17, p. 17.*

According to the *Review* article (p. 17), Folkenberg wanted the wording even stronger. He wanted to be known as the topmost decision-maker in the church; he wanted to be called “the chief executive officer,” like the CEOs of all the major corporations.

“The Commission’s original wording defined the president as the ‘chief executive officer.’ However, numerous **Annual Council members said that the title seemed more appropriate for the business world than for a church. So a change was voted to ‘first officer.’**”—*Adventist Review, April 17,*

p. 17.

Previously the General Conference president had been only one of a tripartite of three leaders working with a larger committee,—but from now on we are to have a king. **One man will be ruling over the church. He will send his directives down the line, and they are to be done, or any lower-level leader who refuses to do so can more easily be disciplined or ousted.**

AGENDA ITEM #3 - Reporting to the president; i.e., clarifying total subservience.

Henceforth, neither the General Conference secretary nor treasurer will be able to peep nor mutter to the Executive Committee, without first receiving approval from Folkenberg.

“Another ‘linkage’ item proposes wording to define the relationship among the three executive officers. It says that both the secretary and treasurer ‘shall report to the Executive Committee **after consultation with the president.**’

“The three officers already report to the Executive Committee, but this [new ruling] would require the two officers to report **only after** consultation with the president.”—*Adventist Review*, April 17, p. 17.

“**These changes alone, if voted [at Utrecht], would significantly alter the way our world church is governed and represented.**”—*Adventist Review*, April 17, p. 17.

Here is a brief summary of these first three agenda items:

“**These three items would clearly define all presidents as the top leaders of every level of church organization**, under the direction of constituency sessions and executive committees.”—*Adventist Review*, April 17, p. 17.

AGENDA ITEM #4. Changing working relationships; i.e., General Conference workers are to be given a different boss.

Each General Conference department, service agency, and other entity has previously answered to the Executive Committee. But henceforth, they will also answer directly to a single man, the new Adventist king.

“Instead of working solely under the direction of the Executive Committee, this recommendation was that departmental, association, agency, or service directors and secretaries ‘**shall work under the direction of the president** and the Executive Committee’ and ‘shall occupy an advisory relation to the field.’”—*Adventist Review*, April 17, pp. 17-18.

Henceforth, Folkenberg will have the authority to demote or fire any General Conference worker who gets in his way. Such power is awe-

some, and should not be granted to a man who has worked so hard for four years to obtain it.

“The directors/secretaries would no longer be solely responsible to the Executive Committee, but would be accountable also to the guidance of the president.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

In recent years, very few men have dared oppose the will of Robert Folkenberg. This agenda item will change all that. No one will henceforth be able to oppose his will.

“This addresses those occasions when some leaders felt they did not have to respond to the president, since **they had been elected by the constituency and were directly responsible to the Executive Committee and not to the officers.**”—*Adventist Review*, April 17, p. 18.

AGENDA ITEM #5. Simplifying nominating committee work; i.e., cementing the control over subordinate church officers.

This is the fifth sensational recommendation, which powerfully impacts our church—and effectively ties up the workers, placing them under the control of a few men.

The principle underlying the matter is simple enough: If a committee authorized by a large constituency places you in office, you are less obligated to do wrong, when requested by your supervisory officer,—than if he hired you!

But, henceforth, it will be Folkenberg who will be overseeing the hiring of nearly everyone in the General Conference!

“Following the lead of numerous unions in North America, **a recommendation would limit the number of church leaders chosen at a GC session to only General Conference officers, departmental/association directors, the Auditing Service director, and the three executive officers of the 11 divisions.**

“**All other GC and division service and associate directors and leaders would be appointed**, rather than *elected*, by their own respective executive committees.

“**This is a dramatic departure from what the church has done for years.**”—*Adventist Review*, April 17, p. 19.

Do you realize what this means? This will help tie into bundles every church officer in mainstream Adventism!

The Session delegates, voting on the main floor, were already rubberstamps—due to the large percentage of church officers and their employees who were appointed as delegates. Now the Session nominating committee, working in a back room, will also be reduced to near virtual

inactivity as well!

“[Enactment of this agenda item] would certainly shorten the work of the nominating committee. Instead of electing more than 194 leaders, the committee would elect less than 70—three for each division and about 35 for the GC.”—*Adventist Review*, April 17, pp. 19-20.

As if the controls in the above five agenda items will not be tight enough, the president is determined to make sure that the key information agencies for the church are also brought to heel—Adventist Review, Ministry magazine, Sabbath School Quarterly, etc. Read this:

“If passed by the GC session delegates, a Constitution and Bylaws amendment would add that editors and associate editors for the principal denominational journals prepared at the General Conference will be among those appointed by the GC Executive Committee at the first Annual Council following the GC session. These would join a host of others—including all departmental associate leaders—to be appointed then. In the past, editors have not been subject to such review and reappointments every five years.”—*Adventist Review*, May 11, 1995, p. 7.

HOW WE KNOW COWCO NEVER APPROVED NOR ISSUED THOSE RECOMMENDATIONS

At the 1994 Annual Council, Robert Folkenberg told the assembled members of the General Conference Committee that the Commission on World Church Organization had approved the above five items, and was recommending them to the 1994 Annual Council, and requesting that it approve them and send them on to the 1995 Utrecht Session for its approval.

When the 1995 Session convenes in Utrecht, you and the other delegates will be told that the commission approved those agenda items and that, on the basis of that approval, the 1994 Annual Council approved them also.

But the Commission on World Church Organization never even voted on those agenda items! It never approved them! It never recommended them to the 1994 Annual Council, nor to the 1995 General Conference Session!

Here is the proof for the above paragraph. **It is written by one of the members of that commission.** Susan Sickler is a nurse who lives in Dayton, Ohio. She has served on the two General Conference commissions, which have studied reorganization since 1990; she was a delegate to the 1990 Session; and she will be a delegate to the 1995 Session.

Here are her words:

After stating that the commission did approve three agenda items (reducing size of General Con-

ference Committee, reducing size of Session delegates, and dismantling General Conference Church Ministries Department), she discusses the so-called “linkage” agenda items—the five items which we have already discussed. Here is what she says:

First, she tells us that COWCO clearly split over those five “linkage” items:

“However, a clear split with the group [the Commission on World Church Organization] did develop toward the end of the Gettysburg meeting regarding linkages, a term chosen by Robert Folkenberg. Linkage refers to how authority flows between the various levels of church structure. Bluntly translated, it means giving higher levels more authority over lower levels.”—Susan Sickler, statement quoted in Spectrum, Vol. 24, No. 4.

Then she tells us that only one-fourth of the commission members favored those “linkage” items:

“Based on speeches made before the group and from private conversations, I would estimate that **about one-fourth of the members of the commission had a strong desire to ‘strengthen the linkages.’** About one-fourth were appalled by the idea, and about one-half either never spoke to the issue or fell into the category of, ‘Well, we do need to do something, but I am not sure of the best solution.’”—*Ibid.*

Then she shares a shocking fact. Folkenberg changed commission conversations—into approved recommendations! This highly illegal act is an affront to the commission and to the entire church body.

“Although there is an unwritten rule among Adventist committees that open discussion of topics stays within the room, denominational administration itself broke the rule when **they took certain items from the general discussion—and turned them into recommendations in the final report, without an authorizing vote of the commission.**”—*Susan Sickler, ibid.*

Then she summarizes some of these ‘linkage’ concepts, which were fraudulently presented to the Annual Council (and soon to the General Conference Session) as “recommendations” of the commission:

“Higher levels having the power to merge or dissolve lower levels of structure, higher levels holding the credentials for officers of lower levels; higher levels being free to intervene in credentials’ disputes at lower levels”—Susan Sickler, ibid.

Then she categorically states that the Commission on World Church Organization never approved the “linkage” agenda items!

“On these proposals no consensus ever emerged, nor did the commission ever vote on

any of the proposals . . . Indeed, the commission adjourned its last meeting without ever having voted any of the linkage proposals. Furthermore, it never discussed how the final report would be developed.”—Susan Sickler, *ibid.*

COWCO never voted on the linkage agenda items. It never approved them. It never recommended them. It never prepared the final report of its meetings’ discussions and decisions!

CONCLUSION

Your Church means a lot to you. Just now it needs your help. It always hurts a large organiza-

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GOVERNANCE CAMPAIGN

About a year before the 1990 Session, Robert Folkenberg wrote an article for *Ministry* magazine. It was obvious that he had been doing a lot of thinking about ways to change the church’s organizational structure. He said that if his ideas were followed, the church would have greater efficiency. It sounded impressive. Unfortunately, we did not pay enough attention to the sketch on the cover: a man pulling a horse with a whip sitting in a wagon. —At the time we thought it symbolized the church pulling the organization; the picture actually portrayed the leader pulling the church, when he ought to be driving it.

Subsequent developments proved that true. As soon as Folkenberg was elected president, plans were set in action to put the leader back in the driver’s seat with that whip.

One of his first actions as president was to appoint a Commission on Church Governance (CCG). Consisting of 22 members and chaired by Robert Kloosterhuis, a GC general vice president, it dealt only with revamping operations within world headquarters in Silver Spring. The commission’s report was adopted at the 1991 Annual Council in Perth.

Late that same year, Folkenberg established another commission, which he had himself appointed chairman of: the Commission on World Church Organization (commonly termed COWCO). It included all the division presidents, plus others from the world field. With over 50 members, it set to work to change the governing system of the entire denomination. No longer would the horse be in the cart.

The first meeting of COWCO was at world headquarters, the second and third at Cohutta Springs, Georgia, and the fourth at a motel near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

At those meetings, COWCO was able to agree that the size of Session delegates must be capped, that the GC Committee must be reduced in size, and that a 1985 Session decision to clump several GC de-

partments into one should be annulled. tion to place too much power in the hands of one man, or a few men. The companion set of tracts which is included in this mailing to you, *All Ye are Brethren*, which is filled with Spirit of Prophecy statements, clarifies that in detail.

Just now, come up to the help of the Lord against those who unknowingly are trying to do that which will greatly injure it. Vote NO to each of the “linkage” agenda items. Urge other delegates to do the same. It is not right for one man to try to take over the church.

May God help His people.

partments into one should be annulled.

But the commission members rejected one of Folkenberg’s proposed ideas of “linking” the entire church under a single central control, with lines of control leading from it: the concept that higher levels of authority could directly disfellowship local church members.

In addition, the commission members could not agree on Folkenberg’s other “linkage” plans (the five points listed earlier in this report). Only a fourth of the members favored any of them. Recognized that he dared not bring those items to a vote, lest the record reveal they had been rejected, yet knowing that a favorable commission recommendation was needed in order to get an Annual Council to approve them, a deception was practiced. The disputed items were set aside as unresolved.

Then, at the October 1994 Annual Council, Folkenberg presented the five points as “recommendations from the Commission on World Church Organization, which they wanted the Annual Council to approve and pass on to the Utrecht Session for final approval.”

But COWCO had never approved those five points. It had never recommended them. Indeed, it had been too divided to even vote on them!

When the 1994 Annual Council considered these matters, it limited some of them. Yet major problems remained.

When Folkenberg found that a sixth agenda item was about to be voted down (which permitted higher levels to merge or dissolve lower levels) as too high-handed, he managed to get that item postponed till the Spring Council, which he knew would have fewer lower-level leaders in attendance.

Susan Sickler, one of the delegates to the 1995 Session, summarizes the situation well: “Will the world church in Utrecht vote for itself a level of subservience to higher authority that the United States will never adopt for itself?”—*Ibid.* —Vance Ferrell