

## Preplanning the 1995 General Conference Session —

# The Ominous Utrecht Agenda

Part One of Three

**The fifty-sixth General Conference Session will begin on Thursday, June 29, 1995, in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Every Session in recent years has been significant, but this one will especially be so.**

**Here are intimations of what is planned for enactment at the Utrecht Session:**

**“Too much is at stake when changes are made [in the church’s constitution]. And much will be at stake at the General Conference session, June 29 to July 8—possibly more than at any session in recent decades.”—*Adventist Review*, April 27, 1995, p. 5.**

**“Proposed recommendations for changing our constitution and bylaws, if voted, would significantly alter how the Adventist Church governs itself worldwide.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 5.**

**“It is a session that should long be remembered—for its expected landmark business session discussions and actions.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 5.**

**“Numerous [constitution and bylaws] changes are coming up for a vote this year.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 9.**

**It sounds ominous. It is.**

**In addition to revamping the church’s constitution and bylaws, a major restructuring of the *Church Manual* is also in the offing:**

**“The *SDA Church Manual* is our book of church polity—providing a framework for how we operate our [local] church. As with the constitution and bylaws, changes can be made only by a vote of GC session delegates. More than 50 changes will be voted upon this session.”—*Op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.**

By this time, I believe you are becoming interested in what is going to happen at this latest Session! I have become very interested too.

**“More than 50 proposed changes [in the *Church Manual*] ranging from courtship to discipline will impact relationships with our fellow members.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 13.**

This will be the first Session in twenty years held outside the United States (the last was in Vienna, in 1975). It will be in a location difficult for visitors to attend (see box on most of pages 2 and 3). Perhaps

someone thought it best to keep this Session away from too many prying eyes. In this way, the actions could be voted before anyone back home would know what had taken place. It is well-known that the dangerous parts of this agenda were on the drawing board back in 1991.

**Several years advance work has gone into refining the details of the agenda for this latest quinquennial [five-year] Session. But like a magnifying glass with the sun’s rays, it is all focused on weakening lower level authority and strengthening higher level authority.**

When this year’s official delegates take their seats at the Session, they will be coaxed, cajoled, and led into enacting changes which will have far-reaching results on our denomination.

The official list of delegates numbers 2,639, but it is estimated that, due to lack of funds, about 500 will not attend. That 500 will be lower-level folk from poorer areas (*Op. cit.*, p. 10). But their absence will only strengthen the voting power of higher-level leadership.

Indeed, so many changes in governance are planned, that the delegates will not be able to make it their usual first order of business to appoint the nominating committee—until they first vote on changing it also!

**“The Nominating Committee usually is seated at the first session and begins its work immediately. However, because one of the proposed bylaws changes coming to the floor involves who and how many may sit on the Nominating Committee, its formation and work might face a slight delay.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 11.**

How is that for advance planning! From the very beginning of a Session, the preplanned agenda is supposed to proceed as preplanned, all the way through the songs and reports, down to the final parade (see our earlier study, *The Captive Sessions [WM—114-116]*). Unfortunately, some hitches occasionally occur, which cause chagrin among the leaders (such as the Indianapolis Session’s refusal to ordain women; see *The 1990 General Conference Session—Part 1-5 [WM—295-299]* and *Impact of*

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**Within a few weeks, the 1995 General Conference Session will begin. This is a brief overview of what you will find when you arrive.**

First, you will have to decide if you want to spend the money it will take to go there, rent an expensive hotel room, and take trains each day to the convention center. We will assume you are unusual—and have the money for the trip.

“Plenty of hotel space is still available around Utrecht. If you don’t have housing now, call a travel agency right away. The GC’s official travel agency is International Conference Management in Florida. They handle air travel, too—800-327-8338.”—*Adventist Review*, April 27, 1995, p. 10.

Keep that word “around” in mind. It was noted last year, in the *Review*, that Session delegates would fill all or nearly all the rooms available in Utrecht itself, and that visitors should expect to have to rent hotel rooms in cities as much as 50 miles away—and then bus or train in each day to the meetings! For practical purposes, Utrecht will be remarkably isolated in space during those days in late June and early July when you would like to be there! Although it is expected that upwards of 30,000 people might be there for the concluding weekend, according to the official pronouncement, the visitors will be staying overnight somewhere else.

The fifty-sixth business session of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church will begin on Thursday afternoon, June 29, 1995. It is called the “General Conference Session.” Most of our people do not realize it is the only “General Conference” we have! The General Conference is *the Session*. Early on, the leaders of the church appropriated the name, “General Conference officers,” and then nicknamed the building, in which they work, the “General Conference building.” But neither the men nor the building constitute the “General Conference”—that is the Session!

This is because it is the delegates from the entire world field which constitute the “General Conference.” That was the only “Voice of God” which Ellen White was speaking about in those special statements about an earthly group which the membership should regard with deep respect. (Later, when it became dominated by a few men, she said she could no longer regard it as the Voice of God; see our tract study on the German Reform Church for discussion and statements on this: *The Adventist Reform Church—Part 1-2* [WD—1-2].)

If you are attending this Session, after arriving at the airport in Amsterdam, Holland, you will go directly to the hotel in the city which the travel agency has reserved for you. If you are a delegate, you will board a train at the airport and go directly to Utrecht, a university town 28 miles away, and will disembark at the convention center’s own stop. Leaving the train, you will have arrived at the mammoth Jaarbeurs (pronounced “Yarbors”) Center.

But, before you spend even one dime in Holland,

you will have to exchange funds into Dutch currency, which is the *guilder*. Because the U.S. dollar has seriously eroded in value in recent months, you will say goodbye to many dollars for every purchase you make. So, before entering the center, you may wish to step into the bank, conveniently located next to the convention center, where you can exchange your dollars for guilders.

Upon entering the center, you will register at the registration desk and receive an identification badge, and then go to the ticket sales counter to purchase your meal tickets. After this, you may wish to look for faces you know or wander through mazes of Adventist booths (over 100 of them) in two large exhibition halls within the Jaarbeurs Center. An immense ABC store will be there also. Eventually, in the vastness of this place, overhearing conversations in dozens of different languages as you pass by, you may eventually locate all six food centers, which will be glad to take your meal tickets through the days to follow. (If you planned to bring sack lunches, you will probably have a hard time finding sacks in the hotel or the center, much less grocery store produce to put in them.)

At the meetings you will listen to famous men, watch many singing groups brought at great expense from faraway places, and (if you are a delegate) have the use of instant translation headphones into French, German, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Finally, you will be able to observe the excitement of the *Parade of Nations*, the final mission extravaganza which will be held on the second Sabbath afternoon, July 8. There will be no Sabbath rest that day for many people! It is expected that 30,000 Adventists will be present for the programs on that final Sabbath. As if enough exhaustion will not be provided for that final Sabbath afternoon, *Youth on Parade*, will also be held in the main auditorium.

All the while, in one room off to the side, a small army of *Adventist Review* workers will be putting together the 60 reports and sermons, all of which were prewritten, edited, and set in type long before the Utrecht Session began, and adding, as a finishing touch, the daily discussions of the business meetings—for each of the ten daily *Bulletins*.

If you cannot attend the Session but live in North America, you will be able to tune your living room television set (if you are an average Adventist, possessing a TV and a satellite dish) to the three and a half hours of telecasts from the convention center each day. But those programs will only include the Bible study hour, evening divisions’ reports, and an hour of news and commentary. You will not see the crucial changes enacted, which will transform a preplanned agenda—into a new governing system for our denomination.

Early that first Thursday afternoon, you will want to be in your seat as the Session officially opens with the seating of delegates. Each working day of the Session, some time will be allocated to business meet-

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ings. In our earlier expansive study, *Captive Sessions [WM—114-116]*, we noted in detail the several ways that General Conference Sessions are controlled. One means is by limiting the actual duration of business meeting hours to a remarkably few hours. Much of the time is instead diverted to the presentation of reports and entertainment by all 11 divisions and attached territories (filling every evening), marching in parades, and listening to introductions, greetings, and more reports (part of most days) from various departmental leaders and special guests.

You find it hard to believe me? The 1990 Session, typical of all of them, cost 18,530 days in workers' time and salary while at Indianapolis, cost over \$12 million,—yet provided only 36 hours of business meetings for the entire ten-day Session (see WM—114-116 for much more detail).

To add to the time-filling, this year the delegates will be asked to spend much of Thursday afternoon, July 6, in six "breakout" groups, where they will discuss six "major church problems" and give suggestions as to how leadership can deal with them. Two of the six topics for these six groups are "A reexamination of the church's role in religious liberty" and "how to curtail the growing global distribution of tobacco"!! Time wasting, yes, but there is a studied purpose in wasting the delegates' time.

You see, unknown to most people, Session delegates have immense power. They have the authority to initiate, enact, and change. Therefore much advance planning is given to holding the actual business ses-

sions down to a remarkably limited time frame, and then filling that time with prearranged agendas, discussions, reports, and the plea that discussion should be limited since there is little time in which to cover the entire agenda.

Those two thousand or so delegates have the power to return the church to its historic teachings and practices. Yet, as usual, they will merely follow along the trail of rubberstamped agendas, parades, and prepared reports. For more on this, see *Captive Sessions [WM—114-116]*, in section two of our *Organizational Tractbook*.

The first of those reports will be given on Thursday evening, June 29, at which time Robert Folkenberg will deliver his *president's report*. In it, he will note the progress made during his reign, and urge the delegates to be attentive during the agenda presentations, so further progress can be made in the church.

That which he will not mention that evening is that, by rubberstamping the officially prepared advance agenda with their votes of approval, the delegates will be greatly accelerating a special type of progress: an immense strengthening of authority by General Conference, and other upper-level, leaders over the entire church.

A secondary reason for his report will be to present such a polished appearance, that he will be able to be swept back into office the following day by the nominating committee.

Well, with such an introduction as this, you surely will want to be there to see it all happen.

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*Indianapolis—Part 1-3 [WM—304-306]).*

But, in railroading agendas through to a victorious vote, the wins to a few can bring losses to God's cause as a whole. We sorrow that men feel themselves above reading God's Word—the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy—and submitting to it.

It is Scripture which ought to be in command at every Session, just as it ought to bear sway at every church committee meeting—from the highest level to the lowliest.

**In anticipation of the soon-coming General Conference Session, let us quickly survey only a few of the broad areas of change which leadership wants enacted at Utrecht. In nearly every one of the proposed changes we will discuss, below, please note that the objective is to give more authority to an upper level, and subtract it from a lower level—whether it be the church board over the constituent local church, a higher set of leaders over lower ones, or a leader over his workers. The monotonous regularity with which we will find this in the agenda items**

**to be discussed in this study is ominous in the extreme.**

**First, we will consider a few key proposed Church Manual changes:**

"This year's General Conference session delegates will consider about 50 *Church Manual* changes that have been recommended by the Annual Councils of the General Conference's Executive Committee since 1990.

**"Many recommendations involve minor changes in grammar or wording. But others propose significant changes in how local churches operate."—Op. cit., p. 13.**

We will here note only four of them:

1 - **When a local church wants to discipline a member (for opposing lowered standards, the new theology, Celebrationism, etc.), henceforth, the matter will have to be brought before the church board before it can be considered by the church members at a constituency meeting.** This rule will increase the power of the pastor and a small group on the church board, in pushing through the discipline or disfellowshipment of errant or vociferous

members.

**2 - When discipline is applied, it can be for 12 months, whereas it formerly could not be longer than 9 months.** Troublesome members can be disciplined longer than before.

**3 - The nominating committee will henceforth be able to elect church board members for two years, instead of one.** This option, if adopted, will make it easier for board members to defy the wishes of the members during their term in office. Local church board members can become more entrenched in office. Church boards will have two years in which to effect modernizations in standards, worship, and beliefs before they have to answer for what they have done.

**4 - Additional regulations, governing the disbanding of a local church by the conference, will be enacted.** One item of interest: The congregation to be expelled will be permitted to appeal to the union office for arbitration. However, past history has shown that conference presidents, when they wish to do so, frequently ignore union office demands.

**5 - Already approved by the Annual Council as a policy, so that it will not come before the 1995 Session for approval, is the rule that conference officers are automatically voting members of local church boards.** Of course, this is an illegal action (as was the wedding ring ruling; see *Illegal: Wedding Ring Ruling [WM—162]*), because neither the local church nor a General Conference Session approved it. This new regulation has the potential to have a remarkable effect on local church decision-making.

“Already voted and now being implemented as *policies* by the 1994 Annual Council [is this ruling which] won’t be coming to the GC session . . . [It] **makes all officers of higher organizations ex officio members—with voting rights—of the next lower organization.**”—*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

“[Prior to this new policy] authority lies within the constituency at all levels—even in local churches. Until this policy was voted, the only real option available to higher levels was its influence or the radical option of voting an offending level out of the sisterhood of churches, conferences, or unions.

**“The new policy now gives the officers of higher organizations full voice and vote—not just influence—in the matters of lower levels.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 18.**

**Proposed changes in the constitution and by-laws of our denomination will also be presented to the delegates at Utrecht.**

“Delegates at General Conference sessions always vote at least a few changes to the foundational

document that spells out how the Seventh-day Adventist Church governs itself—the GC Constitution and Bylaws.

**“But at this summer’s session the proposed changes won’t be ‘just a few,’ nor will they make only minor changes in wording. They will seek to alter core elements of the church’s governing structure radically.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 16.**

As reported earlier, Robert Folkenberg was the key man behind many of these proposed changes. Within seven months, after taking office at Indianapolis, he appointed a special group to begin devising ways to revamp the entire church structure. **The four objectives, consistent throughout the advance agenda-change planning, were these:**

**1 - Give higher leadership levels more control over lower leadership levels.**

**2 - Give the General Conference more control over all levels, and especially the higher ones.**

**3 - Give the General Conference president almost exclusive control over everything done on the General Conference level.**

**4 - Give the local conference president authority to disfellowship individual church members.**

We know the above to be true, because of the agenda which was prepared for the forthcoming Session.

This group which Folkenberg set up was given the name, the **Commission on World Church Organization** (to which they gave the acronym COWCO). It was appointed by the General Conference Executive Committee in 1991. What is the Executive Committee? It is a small group of men in world headquarters, chaired by Folkenberg. As you might guess, Folkenberg was appointed chairman of COWCO.

As we stated in earlier papers (*1990 General Conference Session—Part 1-5 [WM—295-299]* and *Impact of Indianapolis—Part 1-3 [WM—304-306]*), Neal C. Wilson’s long reign (January 1979 to July 1990) had been used by him to gain a powerful control over General Conference personnel. In 1990, we publicly stated our prayerful concern that Folkenberg, as the new president, would now work to unravel that centralized control.

**But, instead, Folkenberg set to work to devise changes in the bedrock constitution of our church, which would forever chain workers to the car of the president! A one-man power was**

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## Preplanning the 1995 General Conference Session —

# The Ominous Utrecht Agenda

Part Two of Three

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**sought. Or, to put it in the words used by Ellen White, “a kingly power.”**

COWCO set to work. **The objective was not to simplify the governance structure of the church, but to bind it more closely together under upper-level leaders.** This is partly done because of the eternal grasping of man for more power. But there was also another aim: to tighten the church’s structure and powers of discipline, so that leaders could more easily withstand the continually increasing clamors of historic believers, both for a return to our original beliefs and standards and for the ouster of new theology pastors, administrators, teachers, and editors.

**In order to give the project a noble appearance, “nine principles” were stated as the objective. Let us note and comment on them:**

“Commission members met for days on numerous occasions and focused their work around nine principles:

“1. Preserve historic commitment to a global identity and unity.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 16.

[The twin objectives are identity and unity, not historic beliefs and practices. Under the name of “unity,” ranks are to be tightened and closed against complainants.]

“2. While providing for a rapidly growing membership, maintain only structures appropriate to accomplish the mission at every organizational level.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

[Strip away the semi-independent status of divisions, unions, conferences, hospitals, publishing houses, mission stations, and local churches, which Ellen White persuaded the 1901 Session to enact. Only leave that which accomplishes the mission of leadership at every organizational level.]

“3. Define clearly the functional relationships between entities.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

[Provide more detailed definitions of the relationships—so that higher levels can more easily intrude upon and control lower levels.]

“4. Delegate authority so that it may be exercised at the lowest appropriate organizational level.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

[Delegate upper-level authority so that it may be exercised at the lowest appropriate organizational level.]

“5. Ensure that the decision-making process is participatory, informed, effective, and efficient.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

[Lower levels will be required to inform upper levels of what is being done, and to invite them to their meetings, so they can effectively control what takes place.]

“6. Provide appropriate organizational spans of control to accomplish the church’s mission.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

[Ditto.]

“7. Establish the most effective lines of communication among all levels of structure.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

[Make sure lower levels are listening to and obeying upper levels. As a special objective, a gigantic training program is also being set in place. Folkenberg knows that a well-trained army keeps in step better when it is continually fed information by leadership. Therefore, he has instituted a worldwide CompuServe computer net, and is using video production more intensively than earlier presidents did.]

“8. Allow flexibility for regional and cultural diversity in organizational roles.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

[First, give leadership greater leeway to do as they wish, in the process of exercising these controls. Second, set up an organizational framework so that those areas of the world field which are more liberal can push forward in following the world, even though other areas are not as progressive. Two objectives are these: (1) Change the constitutional structure to permit women’s ordination after Utrecht—even if that ordination is not approved at Utrecht! (2) Make it easier, in the future, to ape still other of the latest fads of the other churches (Celebrationism, etc.), without having to submit the innovations to forthcoming Annual Councils and Sessions for prior approval.]

“9. Establish a process for matching position requirements and personal qualifications, ensuring a broad spectrum of representation.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

[Eliminate the election of subordinate leaders in

the General Conference, divisions, unions, conferences, and other entities, by various constituency meetings. Instead, let the elected president appoint anyone he wants. The excuse is given that he can do a better job than a committee in matching job requirements to the people to fill them, and this will ensure a broader spectrum of candidates to choose from. But the real reason is the control he will have over every subordinate.]

**If you doubt any of the above bracketed comments, read on. Your doubts will quickly vanish. The structural changes which COWCO arrived at—clearly explain the “nine principles” they prepared as whitewash to rationalize their recommendations.** By their fruits ye shall know them, and in the Utrecht agenda we are seeing the fruits.

When the commission (COWCO) concluded its work, it presented its recommendations in a sixteen-page document (yes, 16 pages!) to the 1994 Annual Council.

But one point was missing from that report. That was **the agenda item requesting that local conference leadership be empowered to directly dis-fellowship any local church member, which any level of leadership might wish to eliminate.** One of the COWCO committee members had prematurely let the cat out of the bag on that one, and a copy of his printed statement was sent to us. We published it and sent it all over America and overseas. Awhile after that, the *Review* reported that this point would not be presented to the 1995 Session to approve. So many complaints had been received that leadership wanted to distance itself, and even said this point had not been considered. But that one report, which we twice printed, clearly revealed that it was fully intended as an agenda item for the Utrecht Session. (See *Disfellowship Item Removed from 1995 Session Agenda [WM—592]*.)

So the 16 pages of COWCO recommendations was presented to the 1994 Annual Council for their approval. It landed like a bombshell.

**“These changes won’t impact your life directly, but if they’re adopted, they will critically alter how our denomination is governed and represented. Not in recent decades—maybe not even since 1901—have so many pivotal changes come up for a vote.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 16.**

**Upon looking over the 16 pages from COWCO, it was clear to our leaders, gathered from all over the world field, that two objectives were intended: (1) Give Robert Folkenberg a steely grip over the world headquarters and all its directly controlled entities, and (2) give upper-level leadership greater controls over all lower-level entities—in-**

**cluding the local church.**

(By the way, what are the entities of the General Conference, which will soon be subjected to tight control by Folkenberg? Here are a few of them: [1] *General Conference departments*, such as the Ministerial Association, Religious Liberty Association, and Auditing Department. [2] *General Conference services and agencies*, such as *Adventist Review*, ASI, Biblical Research Institute, Risk Management, Geoscience Research Institute, and Office of General Counsel. [3] *General Conference institutions*, such as Andrews University, Home Study Institute, Adventist Media Center, and Christian Record.)

**But, underlying the whole thing, there was to be an increasing degree of control by the General Conference over, not only its own entities,—but also over the divisions and lower levels throughout the world field.**

**The big question was whether the North American Division and the world field, gathered for the 1994 Annual Council, would go along with such a set of proposals. Would all the subsidiary leaders let the General Conference president become a king?**

**To sweeten the deal, the General Conference offered two plums, one to the world field and the other to the North American Division entities. Then, Folkenberg added a third to the unions and conferences:**

*The first plum:* If the package was essentially approved by Annual Council, Folkenberg offered to henceforth let the overseas divisions have greater representation at the Annual Councils.

That sold the package to the overseas divisions.

*The second plum:* If the package was approved, Folkenberg promised to henceforth let the North American Division have more control over selecting members of the Session nominating committee. The agreement was that no longer would the GC’s *delegates, at large*, have a part in selecting the division’s share of nominating committee members.

That sold the package to the North American Division.

*The third plum:* In the course of appeals to get the package approved by the 1994 Annual Council, Folkenberg finally relented and said that unions and local conferences could be excluded from the new, stricter controls over church officer credentials.

That sold the package to the unions and conferences.

The Annual Council grudgingly approved the power shifts to the General Conference,—but, at the same time, voted themselves more power too!

At that October gathering, the council voted some of the recommendations as *policy* items (which ille-

gally took effect immediately, without Utrecht approval). For example, Folkenberg wanted to be able to have absolute control over the General Conference—and be given authority to appoint most of its officers, instead of their being elected. So the Annual Council voted to approve that as a recommendation for Utrecht,—but they then voted some of their own entities the same absolute power, to take effect immediately!

Only a few of the COWCO recommendations were rejected as totally out of hand. Most were passed along to Utrecht to approve.

**Now, let us turn our attention to the most crucial of the proposed changes:**

“Linkage” and “accountability” are key words in Robert Folkenberg’s vocabulary. **“Linkage” stands for abolishing independent thought and action, and requiring that people do as they are told. “Accountability” means penalizing or firing them if they don’t.**

“A number of the proposed changes reflect the commission’s desire to strengthen the lines of linkage—spelled accountability and authority—between the various leaders of the church and between the various administrative levels of the church.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

**1 - Clarifying 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.’ ”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.**

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

For a mess of pottage (a larger representation at the Annual Councils), the Annual Council decided it was willing to sell us out to Folkenberg.

“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.’ ”—*Op. cit.*, 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.’ ”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.**

“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, **Nay; but we will have a king over us. That we also may be like all the nations.**” “And the Lord said, . . . they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”—*1 Samuel 8:19-20, 6-7 [also read 1 Samuel 8:5-22; 10:19; and 12:1, 12-25].*

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.**

**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.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

What does this man think he is, a little god? Can you imagine a busier man than the General Conference president? He spends much of his time chairing meetings or fulfilling speaking engagements. Yet world headquarters must stop and wait for him, before any major decision is made there!

Far from omniscience, Robert Folkenberg is well-known to blunder. At a campmeeting in British Columbia, he greatly ired the constituency with his harsh, strident talk and rough language. When he came to Southern College, he told our college youth that it was better that they wear jewelry and makeup, if they did not have their hearts right with God. The students were so startled at such a statement, that they headlined it in their next student newspaper. Recently, Folkenberg told the Walla Walla College Church that “ ‘nurture’ [caring for people] is a four-

letter word!” That remark so angered everyone, that he afterward posted comments on the CompuServe Adventist bulletin board apologizing profusely. He said this:

“I was in no way singling out the members of the Walla Walla Church. I was in no position to even have an opinion of the life and vision of that congregation. In retrospect, I wish I’d been more careful. Being offensive is seldom necessary and rarely constructive. Obviously, the effect of my comment is evidence that I should have been wiser in making the point . . . Remember, I’m just a man, doing the best I know

how at a task I didn’t ask for. Only the Lord and His presence, forgiveness, and power will ever get us through, for it won’t be because of infallible leaders.” This was the same man who wrote embarrassed letters of apology, in 1991, because he had secretly taken laundered money for his wife from the Columbia Union Conference “worthy student” funds—and had been caught in the act. (See our book, *Col-*

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### EXTENDING THE AUTOCRATIC POWER

**As if it was not enough to give Robert Folkenberg kingly power, the same is being done to the lower-level leaders as well!**

“Two items already voted and now being implemented as *policies* by the 1994 Annual Council won’t be coming to the GC session, but a quick look at them will give a more complete picture of the ‘linkage’ recommendations that came from the commission.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

**The first 1994 Annual Council action will control all decisions made by lower levels; the second will place an iron grip on all lower-level leaders.**

1. **Meeting attendees; i.e., trying to control every meeting.**

**ALL officers of ALL organizations within the church will henceforth have attendance and voting rights at meetings of ALL organizations immediately beneath them! In this way, leaders will be able to effectively influence and try to control all actions by lower-level entities. This means conference officers will be able to sit in on local church board meetings and vote!** Yet that action was approved (illegally) by the Annual Council, without concurrent approval of either the local churches or the General Conference Session.

“The first makes all officers of higher organizations *ex officio* members—with voting rights—of the next lower organization.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

2. **Readjusting approval of officer positions; i.e., Intensifying the control of every church leader by another above him.**

Folkenberg’s COWCO recommended to the Annual Council that **every lower-level officer be approved, at time of appointment, by the leaders of the next higher level.** This action will effectively bring every church entity under a pyramid of control, with Folkenberg standing on the apex.

With conference and union officers excepted from the ruling, this action was passed by the Annual Council and is now in effect.

“A second item originally recommended that **the credentials for all executive officers of lower organizations be issued by the next higher organization.** However, this failed to pass the 1994 Annual Council. A revision was then made and voted [which passed the resolution, but with this exception:] to continue to let conferences and unions issue credentials to their own officers—as does the General Conference for itself and its divisions.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

**For those unacquainted with church history, it was Ellen White who pushed through changes in the church’s constitution at the 1901 Session, which gave semi-automacy to the various levels of the denomination. She did this so, if one entity went into apostasy, it could not drag down all the others below it, and reach to all those above it. But we are now rejecting the Spirit of Prophecy in this matter also.**

“It may be a surprise to many members that higher administrative levels within the Adventist Church do not have direct authority over lower levels. **[Up to now] Authority lies within the constituencies at all levels—even in local churches.** Until this policy was voted, the only real option available to higher levels was its influence or the radical option of voting an offending level out of the sisterhood of churches, conferences, or unions.

**“The new policy now gives the officers of higher organizations full voice and vote—not just influence—in the matters of lower levels.”**—*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

Notice the wording here: “even in local churches.” Henceforth, conference leaders will have voting rights at local church meetings, and be able to exercise greater control of local church affairs.

## Preplanning the 1995 General Conference Session —

# The Ominous Utrecht Agenda

Part Three of Three

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

lision Course: *The David Dennis Disclosures* for details.)

Why is this man of such frail perceptions permitted to grasp all the power of the church into his own control?

Now can you see why we are told:

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

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

We earlier mentioned some of the many General Conference departments, service agencies, and en-

ties. Each of them 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.’”—*Op. cit.*, 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 awesome, 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, as David Dennis has done. This agenda item will change all that.

“This addresses those occasions when some

## CAPPING THE SESSION DELEGATES

There is no doubt that every Session costs us a lot of money. Ten years ago it was reported that the total Session cost was about \$12 million for the organization, and another \$15 million for visitors.

But one of the recommendations is to permanently limit the number of Session delegates to 2,000 or 2,650. (This year’s delegates theoretically total 2,639).

Of the two options, it would probably be best to place the cap at 2,000. However, there is a better way to do it, one which will not be presented at this or any other Session; and it is this:

Reduce the delegates at large from 35 percent to 5 percent. There are two types of delegates, *regular delegates* (chosen from the 11 world divisions on the basis of organizations and membership), and *delegates, at large* (a host of work-

ers at the General Conference and its various entities).

It is such a packed host, that delegates, at large, comprise fully 35 percent of the total number of delegates to each and every Session! This means that the General Conference can automatically count on 35 percent of the vote in favor of any agenda item it presents. —All the General Conference leaders need is a mere 16 percent more votes to pass any motion they place on the agenda, and make it a law of the church!

Because each Session is mostly a rubberstamp operation, it would be well to reduce the cost of holding them. Not only should the number of delegates be reduced, but, as we have mentioned in the past, a permanent location in the country should be established where they can be held. The cost of setting it up would cost no more than one or two Sessions, and it could also be used for other large gatherings, such as youth congresses.

### DOWN-sizing THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

There are, at present, 362 members of the General Conference Executive Committee. But a Utrecht agenda item will change that. The plum which Folkenberg promised to the overseas divisions was to give them a higher percentage of members on that committee, and to pay their way to forthcoming Annual Councils.

In addition, by mutual agreement, the number of members in the Executive Committee will be reduced to 240. The reductions will largely come from subsidiary officers in the General Conference and division offices.

### CHANGE IN GENERAL CONFERENCE DEPARTMENTS

In 1985, at the New Orleans Session, N.C. Wilson wanted several General Conference departments merged. He thought it would be easier to control a few departmental leaders, than a larger number of them.

But in the years since, the merged departments have only resulted in confusion. So an agenda item is to return to approximately the old system.

Folkenberg will not be threatened by the presence of more departmental leaders,—since henceforth he will be the one selecting them! If they do not obey, out they go!

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.**—*Op. cit.*, p. 18.

### 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.”—*Op. cit.*, 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.”—*Op. cit.*, 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.

**Due to the serious implications of this matter, a companion two-tract set has been prepared. Entitled, “All Ye Are Brethren,” it is composed entirely of Spirit of Prophecy statements, and is now available from us. You will find it invaluable.**

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