

# Journey to Utrecht

PART ONE OF THREE

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## THE FIRST REPORT

*Two faithful Advent believers, a man and his wife, journeyed to Utrecht, Holland, and attended the entire General Conference Session. For a variety of reasons, they were not able to attend all the meetings, but this is what the husband observed or learned from others while there.*

We arrived at Utrecht early. Fortunately, through a friend, we were able to arrange to stay in a small hotel in Utrecht itself! We were thankful. Nearly all visitors to the 1995 General Conference Session had to stay in hotels in cities miles away from where the meetings were held. **Some had to travel by train an entire hour each morning, and back again each evening.**

Tickets were an ongoing problem. You had to buy tickets for

meals. **But there were long lines of people trying to buy their tickets. At times, people waited an hour in line.** But there were no signs warning you what you would find when it was finally your turn. Then the ticket agent would tell you that you must go to the bank, outside the center, and change your dollars into Dutch currency, which is the *guilder*.

I had to do just that. After waiting in line almost an hour, I was told to go to the bank to change dollars into guilders. Then, when I returned, they told me I had to get at the back of the line and start all over!

Everyone in line recognized what the problem was: **They should have had more ticket agents;** that would have made the lines smaller. But, throughout the ten-day Session, that was never done.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, I ran out of tickets and had to get into that line several times before the Session ended. In desperation, I bought extra tickets. But then, as the Session neared its end, **I took them back and tried to get my money back. But the ticket agents refused to do that.**

So I went to the line, in order to sell my tickets to someone else. Surely, that ought to be a fair thing to let me do. But no, I was told that was illegal, and I must go outside the building and try to find someone to sell my tickets to! Of course, that was very hard to do.

So much for meal tickets.

The main meeting hall, at the Jaarbeurs Center, was cavernous. Near it were several other large buildings. A person could easily get lost from his friends in them.

The booths were fascinating. **It**

*Presidents: Worldwide Divisions and Unions, and North American Division Conferences—*

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**The fourth report is one you will find particularly significant (pp. 8-10). It discusses the dramatic threefold shift in power which has occurred.**

It is obvious that, **henceforth, those of you who are union conference presidents, world-**

**wide, will be in a better position at Spring and Annual Councils to demand a return to our historic standards and doctrinal positions.** Be sure to attend and be sure to speak up. **Perhaps thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this.**

Thank you.

—Vance Ferrell

was a bazaar; that is the only way I can describe it. Over a hundred booths with all kinds of things on display. Some were the kind you would have found at our General Conference Sessions decades ago; but **others were like a flea market. There were trinkets and souvenirs. In one booth, the people sold European cheeses. A number of them were clothing sales!** We went into the booth section a number of times. Gradually the clothing booths got larger, as they crowded into the aisles, where rugs had been laid. There was hardly room to walk by them. **The place seemed like a five and dime store.**

**In several booths, people were selling strong music—and playing their wares quite loud so that it could be heard around, conflicting with other semi-rock music from other booths.**

I spoke with one of the men, supposedly in charge of the affair, and **he told me the booths had gotten out of control. Yet, surely someone there had the authority to do something about it!** I was told the European divisions wanted a bunch of the concessions so they could assign them out. **At any rate, the booths were a bedlam of noise and sales activity.**

In the main meetings, Folkenberg was a shoe-in. But it was to be expected. The first action was a motion to reelect him, and the delegates were hardly settled into the week, and knew not what else to do. **Yet there were many who did not want him in. I spoke with a number of them, and they told me of others. People fear his attempt to take control of the General Conference—to a degree never attempted by anyone since 1901.**

**McClure also got back in, although there were those who did not want that to happen either.**

Arriving early before the Session began, and leaving late, I had the opportunity to speak with many

delegates and leaders.

N.C. Wilson sent out a letter opposing the Pilgrims rest book, *Collision Course*, about what Folkenberg did to destroy Dennis. **Folkenberg was terribly upset that that book had been sent to so many of the delegates.**

Wilson is not for Jack Sequeria, but Folkenberg is trying to protect him. **There are important men in the church who want to get Sequeria stopped, because of his strange teachings.** But, instead of a formal hearing, Folkenberg has saved him by asking Biblical Research to work on the matter.

**At the meetings, it was shocking to hear all the applause.** I would estimate about one third did not applaud, but the others made up for it. **They even applauded for prayer! After sitting or standing for a prayer, they would applaud the one who gave it!**

**They applauded in the middle of sermons; you would think it was a political speech or a rally of some kind.**

**There was also an interesting use of applause to help sway votes.** When a leader up front, or a delegate speaking at a roving mike, spoke in favor of Folkenberg's church structure changes, there would be applause in the audience. A few would get it started, and others, eager to show their loyalty I guess, would chime in with more clapping. **But when someone spoke against what was being railroaded through, everyone was quiet; there was no applause.**

Yet I know many people did not like the changes in church structure which Folkenberg was trying to push through the Session.

During the meetings, **people were constantly streaming in and out.** Three quarters through a program—a sermon, business meeting, or evening Division presentation—people would start leaving. Of course, they were trying to avoid the after-meeting traffic jams, both in-

side and outside the center, which occurred as soon as every scheduled meeting was over. But **their premature departures only added to the bustle and confusion of the week.** Many were obviously disturbed by all the movements during meetings.

**The discussion of women's ordination began with three speeches from the platform in favor of it, and only one against! That was just not fair.** When McClure came to the podium to also speak in favor of it, **one delegate arose and said that was not fair, and moved that McClure not speak. But the chair [chairman of that particular business meeting; Rock] refused to accept it.** But that is not parliamentary procedure! Instead, he said, "How many people are with the chair?"

Later, when McClure was chairing, and someone would arise and say, "Question on the motion," in order to cut off further debate and take the matter immediately to a vote, McClure would quickly say, "All in favor; all opposed," **and in this way get what he wanted.**

**When most of Folkenberg's church structure changes were pushed through, one delegate said, "You may have won the battle, but you haven't won the war."**

Because of the stifling heat, it was difficult remaining in the meetings,—**but it was dangerous to leave the building!** Europeans are used to strong-armed authority. There were lots of guards standing around the buildings. One time I went outside to look for my wife. But, **once outside, the guards would not let me back in!** They said there were too many inside, and refused all appeals I made. I told them my seat was saved inside, and they said absolutely not; I could not reenter the building. Fortunately, I finally managed to find a church official who got me back in.

Unfortunately, I forgot and did it again on Thursday afternoon. The guards would not let me back in—and that was the end of that day for me.

**When it was time to go back to the hotels each night, nearly all the visitors had a rough time. One would almost think the General Conference put the Session in a place where it would be hard for visitors to attend during the week, and hear what went on in the business meetings.**

Some had to ride on the trains for an hour each way, from a hotel in some other city. Utrecht is just not large enough to hold all the delegates, and visitors too.

In our little hotel, we were fortunate to get granola, because a friend knew the hotel owner. But **in most hotels, they only served a “continental breakfast,” which consists of coffee and a roll.**

**The prices were terribly high! Many paid the equivalent of US\$120 to US\$150 per night.**

**Because the American dollar is currently quite weak, it buys less overseas. This only added to the problems** of all who came to Utrecht to attend the Session.

I talked to a lot of people while there, and learned that **the hotels doubled their prices while our people were in town.** [The Adventist convention was later declared to be the largest in attendance since the Jaabeurs Center was opened.]

Leaving the hotels in the morning, with a continental breakfast in their stomachs, the Adventists would head back to Jaabeurs Center on the trains (or, if they were Europeans, in cars). Arriving again in Utrecht, **those who came to the Session, without being subsidized by the church, had to pay high prices for the food they ate in Utrecht. The food was the equivalent of US\$10 a meal. If you wanted to eat at the restaurant, it was 30 guilders, which was \$20 a meal.**

**Also you had to wait so long to get a meal.** But the speed lines, on the six food eateries there, were OK. They were set up in such a way that they could handle many, many people.

Then there was the music. The first Sabbath evening in the main auditorium, **the show (what else can I call it?) was put on by the South Pacific Division. The SPD office tries to deny the fact that they are the most Fordite division in the world, but the program they put on would surely convince you. It was terribly wild music. Yet the program was held while it was still Sabbath. Also included in their show was a video clip of upcoming sports events in Sydney. Yet all this occurred during the Sabbath hours.**

Many were terribly disappointed at the direction our church is going. I could see it in their faces, and a number told me so.

My children are all grown, so I did not go to any of the youth meetings. They were held in a different building somewhere else. So I do not know what kind of music *they* had!

When the South Pacific Division meeting concluded **at 9:30 p.m., workmen immediately set to work, tearing out the place, to prepare it for the Sunday morning business meeting. Yet, because of the northerly latitude of Holland, Sabbath did not end till 10 p.m. Those men could have been told to not begin work till later. They had all night to do it! But no, they were told to start before the Sabbath was ended.**

**On the second Sabbath evening, a woman sang a jazzy song, just before the flags came marching in. It was still Sabbath, but was hardly a presentation to be held during those holy hours. I understand there was a lot of preparation, which had to be made late in the afternoon, for**

**the marching and demonstration of national flags.**

The press of people was strongest on the weekends, and a person had a hard time sitting through meetings—since there was no air conditioning. **I found none anywhere in the buildings. Air was blown in from outside, but, since the weather was often hot and humid, it did not help much.**

**Parking was a disaster.** One had to pay the equivalent of US\$60 for a parking space during the Session, but, on the weekends, there were cars parked everywhere. Fortunately, the illegal parking was not ticketed. **Jaabeurs had provided a lot of seating space inside, but not enough parking space outside.**

#### THE SECOND REPORT

***This report is from an elderly woman believer who also attended the entire Utrecht Session.***

Yes, I went to the 1995 Session, but it saddened me very much. **All this clapping. People actually cheered, and sometimes they stamped their feet. And this went on, frequently, throughout the meetings.**

We should praise God, not man.

I did not like the irreverence. It was all right with me to see people keep walking in out and out, and up into the bleachers. But they did more than that; **they would stand in the aisles and talk together during the meetings! That is neither courteous nor reverent. This happened even during devotional meetings, when the preacher up front was preaching from the Bible.**

People were not considerate. **They would leave their drink bottles and dirty diapers under the seats, and go off and leave them.**

Then there were the women wearing shorts. Yes, it was sum-

mer, but women wearing shorts entering a religious meeting of Seventh-day Adventists! and doing it on Sabbath morning! This was the General Conference Session, yet no one told them they should not do this. **Shorts, low necklines, and even on the Sabbath. Jewelry and makeup.** I am thankful I was taught better. I do not understand what is happening. **What is happening to our church?**

Yet in the *Review*, they talk as though this Session was a great triumph for our people. **Triumph? It was a great disgrace.**

I attended the religious meetings, but I did not attend all the business meetings. I would rest in the middle of the day, and then again attend in the evening. [She was one of the few visitors who was able to lodge in Utrecht itself.] I liked the reports from the different world divisions. I like to hear about work in other lands, and see their costumes and flags.

For years, I was a Sabbath School teacher. So, **on the last Sabbath, I went to the youth and children's meetings. In one, they showed Elder Folkenberg standing up, holding a piece of pie. He said to give the young people a piece of pie to keep them for dinner.**

**Then there was the music! I was so sorry about the music.**

Youth are important, but they are not to be on top, for they are still youth. We are to instruct them in the path to heaven, but **we are not to pander to their childish ways, present foolish programs, crazy music, and all the rest. That is not training them for heaven.**

**That same Sabbath afternoon, they had a silly puppet show for the young people.**

About women's ordination, I talked to a lot of people in the auditorium. I sat at the table eating with them. Workers, delegates, leaders. **A lot of them were very**

**unhappy with what's going on. But they don't know what to do to stop it.**

There was a woman they brought from Florida. **She was supposed to demonstrate how to conduct a model Sabbath School kindergarten class.** Well, I had taught kindergarten and other classes for years, so I went to see what she would have to say. You can always learn from others.

Well, first she put up a regular kindergarten set. Then described the program: welcome, prayer, mission story, felts, and the rest.

Then she said suddenly, **"That is old potluck!—and you need to get out of it!"**

Then she said we had to do it the way the father did for the prodigal, when he returned. She said, **"Put on food and give them lively music! They're forgiven, so give them a feast! Put on lively music! Give them love; play musical chairs!"**

I weep for my church. I will never again go to a General Conference Session. This was my last.

I could not take another.

### THE THIRD REPORT

*This third report was prepared by a European believer who attended the Utrecht Session. You will find it quite thoughtful and penetrating.*

I attended the 1995 General Conference Session at Utrecht, the Netherlands. At the beginning of the Session we were exhorted by GC President R. Folkenberg to see the overview of all the proposed changes, and **he denied that these moves were part of a "power-grab."**

Likewise, Calvin Rock, chairman of the Constitution and By-laws Committee warned us that the proposals were "far-reaching" and that he expected vigorous discussion on some of the items. **We were also informed that much of the**

language was "crafted" by Athal Tolhurst, who is "intimately acquainted with how all these policies interact," and that the policies "touch each other in many ways."

Unfortunately many delegates have been frustrated in seeing the overview of the effects their votes may have been having. **When delegates attempted to find the bigger picture, they were told, by the various chairmen, to concentrate only on the issue at hand.** At least twice it was requested that someone present to the delegates an overview of all the actions that were being voted on, and how they would effect each other. **Strangely, the requests were denied** due to the fact that, although Athal Tolhurst was still present, often on the platform itself, there was no one who was able to present such an overview to the delegates. Perhaps Bro. Tolhurst was not the expert that he was supposed to be, **or was it, as some suspected, that there was a desire that the overview not be seen?**

Much of the time spent in the business sessions tended to be taken up with a balance of items relating to **disciplining both members and churches, who should be appointed into office rather than be elected,** and some relatively innocuous changes to the *Church Manual*.

For a visitor **the proceedings could be very confusing, as motions were referred to by item and page numbers.** Even the delegates who had their huge blue and white books **had difficulty wading through the reams of paper and understanding the meaning of a motion or what it was attempting to achieve.**

We were promised startling and important changes but, fortunately,

Continued on the next tract

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# Journey to Utrecht

## PART TWO OF THREE

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

a few of the more radical changes were sent back to committee when it was discerned they had not been clearly presented. **Often, as soon as an item was sent back to committee everything ground to a halt and sessions closed as much as two hours early.** The motions appeared to be so interlocked that once one motion was halted none of the following motions could be presented. **Many delegates complained about the loss of time and feared that they would be forced to make rapid decisions on important items in later sessions. And that was exactly what happened.**

### GC AUDITORS

One interesting early item was **the motion to appoint associate directors of the GC auditing service rather than have them elected.** After debate opened, Tom Miller, a division auditor, was the first to speak and he spoke against the motions. **The motion was then immediately withdrawn by Athal Tolhurst who had proposed it.** This has set a tone at the Session. The delegates had to fight a bit to understand the exact ramifications of the 72 proposed constitutional changes or amendments. **Many believe that the auditor motion was related to the David Dennis affair, and perhaps the reason for hastily withdrawing the motion was to prevent public discussion of this affair.** One was left wondering exactly why this motion was presented in the first place if it could be so swiftly withdrawn again. Bro. Ferrell's *Collision Course* had been

sent to many of the delegates, and that seemed to help awaken them.

### TREASURER'S REPORT

Staying on the financial side of things, one of the first reports was from the Treasurer, D.F. Gilbert. An interesting response was from a delegate from Bolivia, Ruth Cortes, who expressed concern for the way in which the church's finances are being handled. **She asked for a clear system of controls so that all handling of money could be clearly checked and leaders negligent in their stewardship could be held accountable.** The response from Bro. Gilbert, while agreeing with Sis. Cortes suggestion, was that regular financial information is provided. **Again one was left wondering if her request was another allusion to the allegations of financial irregularities that were part of the Dennis Affair.**

### EXECUTIVE REPORT

Otherwise, having dealt with adjustments to the disciplinary procedures, business moved on to another thorny subject at this conference: Who should have voting rights at the Executive Committee meetings?

**Many motions had been sent back to committee, however, when they returned they were often voted on, seemingly with very little change.** The first such motion was to change the content of the GC Executive Committee by inviting Union Conference/Mission presidents to become members of the committee when it sits in their divisions. This meant that there would be added divisional representation from that division. It was noted that every other year the

meetings are held in the NAD, **but it was not mentioned that the first year after the Sessions the GC Executive Committee is always held in the NAD. This means that 3 out of every 5 sessions will be held in the NAD.** The other 2 sessions would be shared, presumably, on a rotating basis with the other divisions.

In a seemingly odd mixture, there were three parts to this motion:

1. **To give Conference/Mission presidents voting rights** at Executive Committee meetings when it is held within their division (**but currently every year the meetings are held in USA**);

2. Definition of the word "causes" for discipline;

3. Redefining the GC Executive Committee quorum size.

It also called for 2 laypersons to be appointed for every 500,000 members).

Many delegates expressed the opinion that the Conference/Mission presidents should be given voice at the meetings but no vote. When the motion was presented **it was again suggested that the those presidents should be given "voice but no vote," but sessions chairman Calvin Rock stated that this was not an option and that it was either "voice and vote" or nothing.** Eventually the motion passed.

### WOMEN'S ORDINATION

We were promised that Wednesday would be an exciting day in the business sessions and we were not disappointed. **The afternoon sessions were dominated by the issue of women's ordination.** The

leafletters were outside the delegates' entrance to the auditorium, and an even balance of two leaflets were being distributed, one from *Adventists Affirm* and one from *TEAM* (which was a colourful sheet with four languages), one for, one against.

The proceedings began, 25 minutes late, with a potted history of the issue of women's ordination presented by Calvin Rock, chairman of this business session. The history finished at the last GC Session where it was decided that women should not be ordained as pastors. **Which brought to mind the question why the whole matter should be on the agenda once again after having been rejected at Indianapolis.**

Of course this is the new improved motion, at a conference dedicated to Unity in the church. The NAD has decided to ask to go it alone, presumably because it does not agree with the world church's decision of five years ago.

**It took NAD president, A. McClure, 20 minutes to present the motion to the floor [while arguing for it], and he was followed immediately after by C. Bradford, the previous NAD president, who also spent some minutes supporting the motion.** He opened his presentation by asserting that he was an "African in the Diaspora," a statement that seemed to aimed at the African delegates. But it was going to take more than a black face to sway the Africans; they had come with their views obviously reinforced by the study.

Next we were treated to a presentation against the motion by Eld. Gerard Damsteegt, which took more the form of a sermon and was assisted by the fact that the salient points were projected on the giant stage-side screen during the presentation. **The presentation was Bible-based rather than culture-based and contained no apologies for not being "politically**

**correct."**

This was followed immediately by another speaker. **Finally, with only one hour and ten minutes before the call to vote, the debate began. There was a big rush to the "for" and "against" microphones, resulting in over 120 delegates forming two equal queues.** It was obvious that not everyone would be able to speak, but 16 of the delegates were able to make their points, **many of whom had prepared statements.**

Here were a few of the points presented by those at the microphones:

- Women do not need ordination to do the work.
- Discrimination is illegal in U.S.; it is the same spirit that inspired the holocaust; the church should not repress women.
- We are a world church, not governed by U.S. laws (African delegate).
- Everyone is ordained to be a medical missionary at baptism.
- Feminism is entering the church.
- The issue promotes factionalism.

**There was strong opposition from the African and Spanish-speaking delegates.** Finally, "question" [to close discussion and proceed to the vote] was called by D. Harris of the NAD, who also had been the first speaker "for" the motion.

Despite question having been called, Benjamin Reaves, Oakwood College president, **was allowed to address the delegates on the subject of U.S. law regarding gender discrimination. [There is no U.S. law mandating gender equality in the ordaining of ministers!]** Then after a call to close, GC president, R. Folkenberg, addressed the delegates for 15 minutes, and finally the secret ballot was called. Out of over 2,154 votes, **61% were against the motion and it was not passed.**

Women's ordination—673 for (31%), 1,481 against (61%), total voting: 2,154. In juxtaposition to previous business meetings at this Session, that had closed up as much as 2 hours earlier, this one ran over by 1 hour.

One interesting point was that Bro. Folkenberg did not take sides in the debate. When asked about this he replied that it was not his role as leader to take a side. An interesting statement considering that he had previously been more than prepared to take sides on other issues. However, now the choice was between not supporting the NAD and possibly losing his N. American power-base or supporting the NAD and being on what was obviously going to be the losing side.

The theme of Unity has been taken up by the attendees here as far as the relationships between each other is concerned, but they showed in **the defeat of this motion that the world church said the NAD was not going to be allowed to break up that unity, especially at the cost of Biblical integrity.**

#### BREAKOUT GROUPS

After the excitement of the previous day's sessions, many would be forgiven for assuming that the high points of the sessions were over. However, the so-called "Breakout Groups" on Thursday afternoon were also raising contentious issues. The Breakout Groups covered various subjects from "Use of Scripture" in the life of the SDA Church to "Abuse and Family Violence."

I chose to sit in on the group that was dealing with the authority of Scripture. Earlier in the Conference a statement had been issued stating our belief in the Bible as God's message transmitted through human writer. It was the question of interpretation which needed to be addressed, as the content on yesterday's motion on women's or-

dination showed. The group's recommendation touched on many points, and recommended Bible/Spirit of Prophecy conferences; initiatives against the infiltration of secular values into the church; the appointment of members of boards who will employ persons "clearly in harmony" with form. What remains to be seen is if any of the recommendations will be taken up.

One interesting point was raised by one delegate: that if we uphold the books of the OT prophets to be the inspired word of God, how do we view Ellen White's writings? Are there degrees of inspiration?

**MISSION REPORTS**

Each evening of the conference there was a mission report from one of the divisions. The response (and, indeed the style and content) to them was varied, particularly the musical content; but one evening's [program] was particularly interest because the Russians were there.

On that night it was the turn of the Euro-Asian Division, many of them in national (or traditional) costume. It is when one sees delegates and guests in their national costumes that one really gets the feeling that we are a world-wide church. The Indian saris, the African fashions, the young Mongolian lady in national dress who was the first to be baptised in Mongolia. The Russian, Peruvian, Japanese, Australian delegates milling around, all go to prove that the SDA Church is truly a world-wide church.

**EAST EUROPEAN DELEGATES**

Many members from the ex-Soviet-bloc countries attended these sessions. For many of them it was their first opportunity since the fall of Soviet Communism. Ukrainians were to be found outside the conference centre entrance every evening in national dress, playing music in a traditional style. There was a large Hungarian contingent and Romanian gypsies could often be seen strolling around. The Hungar-

ians present could be divided into two groups: official delegates from the Hungarian Union and **visitors from the "Christian Advent Community," the so-called "Egervari-Vanko Group" that developed following the illegal disfellowshipments in Hungary.**

**The East-European members were particularly displeased by much of the music that was played** (both within the mission reports and also at various venues [locations] around the Jaarbeurs Centre) Many of them were bewildered by the huge variety of books available at the conference's ABC. These ranged from the latest Morris Venden offering through cheap but quality SOP books to the controversial **"The Clear Word."** Back home, they had almost no books.

**MODERN VERSIONS**

"*The Clear Word*" was on sale, now minus the word "Bible" in the title (except for the advertising display which still carried the dreaded word). Although described as a paraphrase of the Bible, it was not generating much interest. "*The Clear Word*" is, in fact, a devotional book. Most people that I spoke to were not aware either of the book or the controversy it had sparked. Jack Blanco's 7-year epic compilation/rewriting of Bible and SOP had been condemned by some pastors as an Adventist Bible, which could leave us open to accusations of having our own versions of the Bible. As any SDA who regularly attends church or does the Sabbath School lessons knows, we already have our own favourite version—the NIV! Surprised? Well, **a recent visitor to Victoria SDA Conference office ABC (in the South Pacific Union) reported that for every 2 or 3 KJVs sold 10 NIVs are sold.** Previously the King James Version was the "Adventists' favourite," **now the NIV is the standard Bible for SDA schools and teaching; and it is the standard for preaching,**

**quotes in the Review or SS quarterly, etc.**

**ORGANIZED COMPANIES**

In the Session business meetings, **one ominous change to the Church Manual was the change as to who has authority to organise a company.** Previously it was the local pastor who effected the organisation of companies, **now it is the conference or mission committee who has to approve the organisation (or dissolution) of the company before the pastor can act.**

**ATTENDANCE RIGHTS OF OFFICERS**

**Another change voted in was to allow conference/mission officers the right to attend any church business meeting held within the conference territory,** although they do not automatically have the right to vote (unless granted by the church). Another aspect to this motion was that **"the church shall secure counsel from the conference/mission officers on all major matters."**

**OTHER ITEMS**

I spoke with an Executive Committee member re: David Dennis suit. **President Folkenberg is fighting the suit on the basis of separation of church and state;** he is claiming that it is an ecclesiastical issue, and therefore does not come under the jurisdiction of the state. It was said that he feels he may have done some things that he might do differently given the chance, but he did not embezzle. **There is a feeling by some within administration circles that there may be something hidden.**

**The new organisation, Center for Global Leadership, which was voted at the 1995 Spring Council of the General Conference Committee, is the brainchild of P. Follett. It is to provide in-house training so that pastors, etc., do not have to go to outside institutions for teaching.** It was not suggested that

the subjects taught to pastors, etc., would be changed but rather that all training would be done "in house." **So NLP, celebration, etc., could still be taught.** Many felt that its agenda was somewhat "hidden"; there is some feeling of mistrust between body and organization.

I spoke with B.B. Beach regarding the giving of the medallion to the Pope. **He said that contrary to popular myth, he was the only Adventist present**—he did not lead an Adventist "delegation." The medallion was not cut especially for the Pope; many of them had been given away to other people previously. He had only a short time (30 seconds) when he met the Pope and he said he did not bow, kiss the Papal ring, or anything of that nature. He received a gift from the Pope and gave him the medallion as witness of: on one side, the SDA faith, and; on the reverse, the Sabbath. Beach did not refer to the Pope as the "Holy Father"; **that was a misquote, or rather a mistranslation, in the Italian newspaper.** Beach called the Pope "him," but the Italian newspapers would not refer to "*Il Papa*" in such a way and so the translation came out as "the Holy Father." If he had known the furor that it would cause in some Adventist circles he would not have given the Pope the medallion; however, he does not believe that it was an intrinsically wrong thing that he did. Following these sessions, Dr. Beach is retiring as head of the Religious Liberty Dept. **and shifting his focus to interchurch relations.**

Sabbaths at the Session showed up the difference in shades of Adventism. During the lunch break, a couple who looked suspiciously like SDAs were seen buying ice creams (one of which was chocolate dipped). But more flagrant was the group who were sitting at a table outside a restaurant eating their ice-cream sundaes. **Their GC Session badges were clearly visible**

**as they sat there happily breaking the Sabbath.** Upon my return to the Jaarbeurs Centre I mentioned this to a member of the administration staff there. **The response I got was that this was normal practice in some North American circles,** a practice that would, if discovered in European circles, be grounds for censure at the very least, if not disfellowshipment. Perhaps this showed the widening gulf that is opening up in SDA circles between variant understandings of the SDA message. Members are labelled as fanatical conservatives in one country for behaving in a way that would be described as middle-of-the-road or liberal in another. **The liberalism of North America and South Pacific divisions is greeted with horror by the traditional Adventists of the ex-communist, African, and Hispanic/Caribbean countries.**

#### DELEGATE FROM ALBANIA

One if not the high point of the sessions must have been the sight of Meropi Gjika, Albanian delegate who waited for almost 50 years for Albania to be opened up to Christianity. Upon meeting other SDAs for the first time she presented 46 years worth of tithe which she had faithfully saved up. At 90 years of age she was almost certainly the oldest delegate at the sessions.

#### THE FOURTH REPORT

*The final report was prepared by the present writer, is based on several reports, primarily from individuals who attended the Utrecht Session.*

#### WHAT THE SESSION COST US FINANCIALLY

**The 1995 Utrecht Session was expensive in the extreme.** Karl Bahr, GC Treasury Department associate and manager of the last several Sessions, said, "No one really knows." **The Review placed the**

**cost to the church at \$12 million, plus more by the visitors. Another estimate places the cost to the organization as high as \$25 million.** It has been estimated that expenditures, by non-delegates (visitors), brought it up to approximately \$50 million. Some of the ways money was wasted, will be noted below.

Officials at the Ministry of Commerce, in Amsterdam, estimated that, with 10,000 attending on weekdays and 35,000 on weekends, this one convention flowed about \$1.7 million every weekday into the national economy. Each weekend the gain was about \$7.5 million. **The total estimate by the Dutch government was a take of \$26 million.**

They are hoping the Adventists will come back.

The GC originally budgeted \$4 million for direct costs, but one GC official said it was probably closer to \$8 million. All this was aside from the salaries of GC staff for time devoted to the Session.

Then there was transportation and housing of delegates and officialdom. **The South Pacific Division voted more than \$8,000 per delegate. It had 120 of them! That meant that just one of the divisions spent nearly \$1 million on delegate expenses alone.**

**Since there were 2,650 delegates in all, the total spent on them may have reached \$21 million by all the divisions.**

Then there were the multimedia presentations. The divisions seemed to try to excel one another in glamorous presentations. **For example, just one of them cost that division \$120,000.**

We are told, by a good source, that the big screen alone cost \$100,000.

What is the point of all this?

Continued on the next tract

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# Journey to Utrecht

PART THREE OF THREE

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

What are we trying to accomplish?

At the 1985 Session, held in New Orleans, an agency working for the church requested kickbacks from New Orleans hotels, if he was to provide them with delegates. Because of the source, we well-knew it was true, but thought best not to publish it. The Session was already past, and perhaps such a problem would not be repeated at future Sessions.

**But now comes the news that another travel agent (this one located in a different state) may have eased many Adventists headed for the Utrecht Session out of their travel money.**

Southern College, alone, lost \$90,000 to the travel agent, and ADRA reported losses of approximately \$28,000 to him. We are told that many other Adventist colleges and institutions lost undisclosed amounts to that travel agent. **One church official estimated the total loss to church entities at nearly \$1 million.**

The GC had unknowingly recommended this particular travel agent, who lives in the Collegedale, Tennessee, area and had his office on the Southern College campus. He recently filed for bankruptcy.

The court has permitted actions against him to be filed as a criminal lawsuit. It is hoped that some retrieval of funds can be obtained.

**But keep in mind that no court proceedings were ever undertaken against Donald Davenport.** We recently asked a close friend, in southern California, for an update, and were told that Daven-

port is, to this day, a member in good standing at the Loma Linda University Church. That is unfortunate.

**Not only was there no frugality at Utrecht, there seemed to be few standards there as well. The church's traditional ban on jewelry was not evident. Cosmetics, jewelry, and shorts were in evidence, with no reproof. Indeed, the bazaar booths sold jewelry also! Jade necklaces were being sold.**

But many GC and division leaders, who were interviewed, felt that the statistics proved that all was well and that Heaven approved of the church's progress.

Here are some of these statistics which were presented, as mentioned from the platform and included in a press kit, given to reporters in attendance:

- The denomination now has nearly 9 million members. In addition, about 17 million consider Adventism to be their home church. This latter number would include drop-outs and kick-outs.

- Every day 1,428 baptisms are performed, or about one every 30 seconds.

- Adventists now have a "growing presence" in 208 of the world's 236 countries.

- It is estimated that world membership will be 12 million by the time of the next Session, which will convene in Toronto, in A.D. 2000.

- Eighty-two percent of the GC budget comes from North America.

**Thanks to a \$45,000 sermon on the opening day, Robert Folkenberg was reelected.**

Wait a minute! How could a ser-

mon cost a twentieth of a million dollars? Folkenberg's did.

**The GC treasurer's office was billed for a \$45,000 multimedia production** which was fully scripted, with big screen video alone, video with live talk-over, videoed missionaries on location yielding to live interview, and a 3-minute satellite hookup between Folkenberg and a Cambodian missionary couple. To climax his presentation, the video presentation showed a choir in South Africa singing,—then, near the end, spotlights flashed on a darkened area at the other end of the 200-foot stage—and revealed that same choir on stage suddenly continuing on with the song, without losing a word or beat. THIS was an expensive performance!

**Even N.C. Wilson did not do that! All he did was stand at the desk and talk. He did not run a full-fledged political ad campaign on opening day.**

## WHAT THE SESSION COST US STRUCTURALLY

We continue to receive reports on the fallout from the Session. **Here is an overview of what some of the approved changes may produce.** The report which follows is very significant. You will want to ponder it carefully.

Whether planned by the General Conference or pushed through by Annual Council, **the net result of the church restructuring changes at the Utrecht Session will not only include more power to a small group at world headquarters in Maryland, but also more power to the North American and overseas unions.**

Membership at Annual Councils was 70-75 percent North American. However, 90 percent of church members live outside North America. The new changes will theoretically give 90 percent control of the General Conference Committee to officials outside North America.

In addition, **union conference presidents, if they vote in a block, will be able to override the division offices.** This is because the 87 union conference presidents will be able to attend Spring and Annual Council meetings and vote, but associate division personnel will not!

In addition, it was voted that, instead of continuing to let the division committees appoint pastoral and lay delegates to the GC Committee, **union committees would nominate the individuals from which the division committee would select.**

**That will add still more power to the unions at GC Sessions.**

But, *within* the division headquarters, **the presidents will have far greater power. They will lead out in appointing all their departmental directors and associates.** Gone will be the sense of security that a five-year elected term affords. In its place will be a boot-licking approach to retaining a division departmental job.

**It is believed that Folkenberg obtained a three-way trade-off: He asked for more power for his own small clique at world headquarters, and he was willing to give more power to the unions worldwide at Spring and Annual Councils, and more power to presidents within division offices.**

He obtained more power for himself by changing many elected GC offices to appointed ones.

The unions received more power at the council meetings, by larger representation at those meetings and by being able to initially select certain additional delegates to those meetings.

The division presidents got more power by being able to appoint everyone else in their offices.

**Henceforth, the same voting pro-**

**portions at Utrecht will be at the council meetings. But Folkenberg was willing to do it, because he reaped big control gains at world headquarters.**

He pled for L-I-N-K-A-G-E, and he got a lot of C-O-N-T-R-O-L. Not bad for a youngster from Carolina Conference.

**There is one possibility which Folkenberg may have had in mind: In the past, the tendency has been for union presidents not to attend council meetings. If that pattern continues, it could only work in favor of Folkenberg.**

**But that could boomerang, if union presidents came to the council meetings, arrived early, and held caucuses to decide on what their demands and voting blocks would be.**

**There is a concern that the union presidents might rise up at council meetings, and refuse to fund the ministers retirement fund.** The problem here is that the unions have pressing financial needs, yet large amounts of money are placed in the GC-administrated retirement funds—from which the GC is dipping into for various projects and needs. **Why fund it, if it is being siphoned? Some say it is being looted.** You may recall that we reported on this earlier.

**As you may or may not know, the deals were worked out at the 1994 Annual Council. Once approved there, everyone expected they would be voted in at the summer 1995 Session. For the most part, they were.**

**What about laymen on the GC committee?** The old GC Constitution allowed up to 50 percent of delegates to be administrators and the other half “laypersons, teachers, pastors.” In actuality, only 8 to 15 percent were laymen.

**According to the newly revised Constitution, only three laypersons will be allowed per division, or 42 of 260 members, plus any of the 30 members-at-large may be laypersons. So laymen will be down to almost no one at future council meetings.**

**In contrast, a number of U.S. Protestant denominations require that 50 percent of the delegates to governing conventions or commit-**

**tees be laity.**

Last, but not least, there were the parliamentary rules changes. As some of you may know, **by changing the rules governing meetings in its favor, a small group of professional committee men can govern a large voting constituency.**

The name of the game is the “rules of order.” These are considered necessary to govern formal business meetings. Most corporations, organizations, and denominations operate on relatively standardized procedural rules.

But there are exceptions. The Roman Catholic Church has had its own devious set of rules, which it developed in the Dark Ages!

Well, **in 1995, the General Conference in Session also adopted a unique set of church rules.** A new 18-page “General Conference Rules of Order” was voted in. The committee which prepared the new rules excused them on the grounds that they were “rules of order for the church which are in harmony with Spirit of Prophecy instruction and Seventh-day Adventist polity.”

But the key rule changes are not to be found in God’s Word! They include two key features:

**1 - All nominations for office or membership on an executive committee—at any level in the church—must be made by a nominating committee. They cannot be made by the delegates, as a whole, or by the membership (constituency) of the church.**

**2 - Only one name can be presented to the floor by a nominating committee for each position to be filled!** That sounds like the way Russian dictators were appointed to office. When only one name is submitted, it is no longer a democratic process; it is a rubberstamp action.

## LETTER TO THE DELEGATES

*The letter on the next two pages was sent, prior to the Session, by two concerned church members to the Utrecht delegates.*

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