

☆ EDITORIAL ☆

Report of the Retiring President, International Society for General Semantics: 1948-49

THIS COMMUNICATION will be an attempt to analyze what seems to me to be the present position of the International Society, as I was requested to do at the last Governing Board meeting June 25-26, 1949; it will also present recommendations looking toward a clearer definition of goals and toward better methods of co-operation among all those interested in the development of general semantics.

In thinking through our problems, we must consider both the present structure and plans of the International Society and of the other agencies concerned (the Institute, the Chapters, etc.) and the evident social needs which should, I feel, define our objectives. We need to agree upon, and publicize to the membership, a general line of development toward some agreed-upon objectives. An open declaration of a common plan would help each individual see how his own contribution can best further the total aim; it would prevent people interested in different aspects of the development of general semantics from working at cross-purposes because of exclusive concentration by each on limited aims with a consequent underevaluation of the importance of other efforts.

This is especially important for a pioneer social effort like ours. We are fortunate in having an unusually large proportion of members in whom social responsibility and intelligent dedication to wide social aims is high. I cannot but feel that leadership, in both Society and Institute, has not fully utilized this basic resource. Proper co-ordination cannot be secured until an agreed-upon program is projected. (I say this with no purpose to slight the fine work which has made possible a functioning Society and Institute.) But until we have a developmental plan, people cannot see where to fit in their efforts.

Such an over-all program must necessarily be written co-operatively in very general terms. 'The Society' is not a plan in the head of any one individual or any one group of 'prominent general semanticists'; it is a growing and changing organization (the Society 1941, 1942 . . . 1949 . . .) whose extensional reality is the membership and their routines of co-ordination. The general program must co-ordinate the varied activities of the organizations and individuals concerned toward the achieving of common social aims.

In my opinion, the general aim of this co-ordinated activity is necessarily set by the imperative need for cultural reorientation. As Korzybski says, 'A non-aristotelian reorientation is inevitable. . . . The only question is when and at what cost.' I might add 'by whom?' If we do not meet the need, by co-operative teaching effort in all possible directions, others not so well-equipped will have to attempt it.

ANY AIM less inclusive than cultural reorientation seems to me to be pitifully inadequate in terms of social needs and of our opportunity. We are *not* exclusively a scholarly society comparable to a society of linguists or of chemists, nor are we exclusively an association of university professors of general semantics. Our *main* task is not the publication of detailed information in a well-established elementalistic science; the very existence of a Society for General Semantics (*i.e.*, for a *methodology* and a new *system* of evaluation) implies the task of *training* the nervous systems of as many people as possible to act in terms of the order empirically known to be healthy. In this over-all task, academic acceptance is important, but cannot be regarded as a primary and exclusive aim. We can best regard ourselves as a scholarly society which is at the same time much *more* than 'merely' a scholarly society.

Our job is nothing less than to change the order of nervous system reaction which the citizens of our culture receive as their general education. To do this, we must induce and help as many people as possible, *including ourselves*, to train themselves in general semantics.

TO DO THIS job, we have a number of great resources; but better co-ordination of activities is needed. I would list our sources of strength (*i.e.*, factors to be co-ordinated) as follows:

1. THE INSTITUTE. Since its foundation, the Institute has worked at its task of training individuals. It has taught so well that it has not only been able to keep going, but it has trained and equipped several thousand people who, among other things, are the backbone of this Society. Closer cooperation between Institute and Society is urgently needed. For the future, the Institute remains an indispensable training school; its continued existence is necessary to prevent academic dilution and popular distortion of the discipline as general semantics becomes more widely known and taught. The Society should move immediately toward guaranteeing the support and perpetuation of the Institute. We should aim toward a situation in which the Society underwrites and raises the annual budget of the Institute and frees it from the necessity of money-making. This will eliminate the dual solicitation which has made both money-raising projects this year less than completely successful.

2. THE KORZYBSKIAN NON-ARISTOTELIAN SYSTEM. The reason that general semantics can help meet the social need for cultural reorientation is that

Korzybski's work created a *system* of evaluation based on the non-aristotelian assumptions of modern scientific method. The test of this system is the results of training people in the system. If these results are not predicted ones, the system must be succeeded by some non-aristotelian systems, not yet produced. Meanwhile, what constitutes general semantics is not an average of the opinions of the people who talk about it; a system must be taught as a whole.

This does *not* mean, of course, that general semantics is a 'faith' or that Korzybski's personal opinions on other subjects are any part of the system. It simply means that we should study and teach general semantics as a system of evaluation, not as a collection of opinions about 'semantics.' At the same time, we should move at once toward establishing a basic wide-scale research program to give that system a rigorous check in experiment and experience and to establish just what are the effects upon nervous system action of general semantics training. Such a program needs extensive planning and financing, since it will involve the discovery of the *means* of checking a general theory of evaluation. (In this connection, we should also establish means of aiding research in human relations, in electrocolloidal action of the nervous system, in educational methods, and the hundreds of other directions which represent creative additions to the present non-aristotelian system, and which will perhaps form the raw material for a more inclusive non-aristotelian system₂ in the future.)

3. THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY STRUCTURE. A. The central Society office, in large part because of the work of its present staff, is becoming an efficient business office in immediate contact with the members and Chapters, and also serves as an excellent link between the membership and the Governing Board. The lack of an over-all plan of development, and our poverty, has led us to keep this office understaffed, so that the Executive Secretary has been hampered in promotion, co-ordination and administration (his proper functions) by not having assistants to whom to delegate detail. A long-term plan of office expansion should be outlined by the Governing Board to replace the present policy of hand-to-mouth solving of crises. (As a personal recommendation, I feel that this plan should involve, for public relations reasons, definite plans for more commodious, attractive, and efficient office space.)

B. One immediate need of the Society is for a *working* Governing Board. This year the Board established the policy of having one major item of business for each meeting, leading up to policy declarations and instructions to committees and to the Executive Secretary. The carrying out of the policy has been hampered by non-attendance. Several directors have not appeared for a single meeting all year; others absent themselves because of distance, too busy, going out of town, etc. No consistent effort has yet been made to encourage attendance on the part of Chapter representatives. Under these circumstances, the adequate planning of developmental policy is impossible. Not only do

things not get done, but weak leadership is given the membership about what should be done. We should overhaul our methods of choosing directors, provide financial assistance for attendance (especially to strong and distant Chapters), and include study and training in policy decision as part of the duty of a director.

4. **THE CHAPTER STRUCTURE.** During the last two years, the Chapter structure has grown rapidly. The structure empirically proves flexible and strong, providing an excellent medium for promotion, study, teaching, and other aims. New methods of teaching and ways to effect community action are being devised by the stronger Chapters. The growth of Chapters should be actively encouraged. But at the same time it is obvious that a number of weak Chapters will develop and that many will be at a loss for a program. We need to establish an operating plan (regional vice-presidents, a visiting teacher, a Chapter secretary in the central office or other) for the supervision and guidance of Chapters, to help devise vigorous sound programs, in the Chapters, and to prevent drifting, distortion, undignified promotion, etc.

5. **THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS.** Naturally enough, these range from people who just 'join,' like the magazine, approve of the Society, etc., to people interested enough to devote time, money, and effort to the Society's total program. We need more effort to discover and utilize the energies of the latter group more fully, and especially to co-ordinate their work so that A's effort can reinforce B's.

This is the 'map' which I, at least, would make of our resources. Acceptance of a common program, openly published, would make the general semantics movement a unified effort toward common social ends, to be undertaken on many levels, academic, popular, research, teaching, publication, etc. We would have an understood social objective, the teaching of method, and hence avoid the sterile arguments about our objectives and the undignified promotion by uninformed enthusiasts which have slowed down general semantics teaching and earned us the label of 'cultism' in some quarters.

WE NEED an over-all plan, devised with the concurrence of the Institute and of the Chapters, to provide for at least these answers to social needs:

1. **RESEARCH.** A. Planning and supporting basic research for a vigorous check of general semantics as a system. B. Support and promotion of 'creative' research in extensions and applications of the system.

2. **TEACHING.** A. The membership has asked us for learning aids. We need to devise and support a co-ordinated effort to supply the membership with outlines, study sheets, film strips, a manual of learning and teaching, structural charts, etc. This means soliciting funds for, planning and delegating the project

to an executive editor who will collect and edit the contributions of individuals and see the project through.

B. An extension teaching service. If we accept the wide aim (cultural re-orientation by training in non-aristotelian methods) proposed in this letter, a full-time teaching program by trained teachers is indicated. Empirically, intensive courses through the Chapters have increased membership, strengthened Chapters, paid for themselves, increased revenue, increased understanding of general semantics, and have also trained other teachers, increased Institute attendance, etc. As a beginning, at least one teacher needs to be put 'on the road' to give instruction in local communities. The objections raised to such a project seem to me to be somewhat far-fetched. Of course, if we appoint as teachers people who go about just 'talking about' general semantics, or who issue their own opinions about politics, art, etc., *as* general semantics, or blunder into pronouncements about specialized fields of which they know little, then, of course, we will have trouble. I see no reason, however, why the Governing Board would appoint such teachers. Perhaps such a teaching program logically belongs with the Institute, since it is a school; in that event, the Society should underwrite such a program to be put out under Institute auspices.

3. PUBLICATION. We need a publication policy on at least three levels. A. Technical advanced rigorous report of the verification and creative research indicated above. Such publication would be in all probability occasional, subject to searching criticism by competent expert consultants, and of various lengths from one page to a volume.

B. Publication or re-publication of articles, whether specifically on general semantics or on any other subject, in which the method is soundly non-aristotelian; this includes the report of applications of general semantics in special fields. Here I mean the policy and the level which the editor of *ETC.* has in general maintained with what seems to me rather brilliant success over the period of publication. Obviously some publications now out coming from the Institute belong here. Also perhaps we need a restatement of the methodological criteria for publication at this level.

C. Popular teaching material. Restatement of elementary general semantics in the most frankly popular and immediately useful form as is consistent with rigor of formulation. The expansion of *Quote*, or its inclusion (and modification) in an enlarged *ETC.* is indicated.

Naturally, such a developmental program cannot be set up overnight. If we agree, however, that some program like this is our long-range goal, *and publish to all* what we are trying to do, individuals and Chapters will know where they can best step in to do some part of the total plan. We will also have *specific projects* for which to seek additional financial support, and do away with competitive solicitation for vaguely stated purposes.

FOR IMMEDIATE objectives, I recommend that the Governing Board put before itself, its new president and the membership, as jobs to be *done this year*, the following five objectives:

1. Devising a program for the expansion, guidance, supervision, co-ordination of Chapter programs, to be put in operation as rapidly as possible. A definite structure should be ready by next year.

2. A published agreement with the Institute. This does not, of course, necessarily mean 'merger' and cannot mean it during the coming year. The form of the agreement is of less importance than that there should be an agreement.

3. The machinery to produce learning aids for the membership should be set up and functioning by the end of the coming year.

4. The plan for the teaching service should be made, the money raised, the teacher or teachers appointed at some time during the coming year.

5. A *working* Governing Board should be in operation by the end of this year. The necessary constitutional changes and appropriations should be made to accomplish this end.

These objectives seem modest enough for immediate realization and will satisfy the demand for cautious expansion and better co-ordination which the membership presented during the funds campaign.

The past year has been a year of growth, so that the Society at this time has a larger membership, a more vigorous and many-sided program, a more nearly balanced budget, than ever before. General semantics is becoming recognized increasingly as a valuable part of the curriculum of colleges and schools; research and application is proceeding in many fields; more actual teaching of general semantics, both by established institutions of learning and by the Chapters, is going on than ever before.

In turning over the presidency and my Governing Board membership to the newly elected officers, I wish to offer my help in whatever way I can to the formation and carrying out of our growing program. As a personal statement, I would also like to add my appreciation for the loyal and intelligent service which Mr. MacNeal and Miss Kessler have given this year, and my thanks to the working directors and to the many interested members who have supported the society with their advice, their money, their time, and their interest.

FRANCIS P. CHISHOLM
President, 1948-49

Report of the Secretary-Treasurer, 1948-49

THE APPEAL made by the Governing Board of the Society for policy guidance and financial support (contained in the 'Which Way?' pamphlet and subsequent mailings) resulted in some 750 replies to our policy questionnaire (we have 1800 members) and some \$4300 in contributions. Our financial position is much improved, therefore. However, the contributions fell somewhat short of our hopes. Policy recommendations, therefore, cannot be followed in their entirety; those recommendations which are carried out will be selected with careful attention to financial consequences.

Nevertheless, the Society is now in a better position than it has ever been. For the first time since its inception, our balance sheet shows, as of September 30, 1949, a slight surplus. Our cash position is good, current assets to current liabilities at that date being in the ratio of about seven to one. Our operations for the fiscal year 1948-49 were in the black by some \$100, not counting the contributions which resulted from our appeal. The contributions have put us in the clear and given the Society *funds to work with* in the carrying out of its activities and in their gradual expansion. Copies of the audit of June 30, 1949, and subsequent financial statements are on file in the offices of the Society and may be examined by members at any time.

The following is a statement of decisions (some of them tentative) taken by the Governing Board with respect to the recommendations made by members. The recommendations will be discussed in the order of their preference as expressed in responses to the questionnaire. *Teaching Aids*: The Society will undertake to collect lists of available teaching aids in general semantics and related fields (educational films, recordings, charts, etc.); these lists will be published from time to time in *ETC*. The Society is not in a position to enter into the preparation and publication of teaching aids, since such a step would require more capital than is now available. (Attention is called, however, to the recent publication by the Institute of General Semantics, Lakeville, Conn., of wall charts of Korzybski's Structural Differential. These may be obtained from the Institute.)

Traveling Lecturers: The Institute of General Semantics has recently announced that Dr. Francis P. Chisholm will be available as a visiting lecturer in general semantics for short courses wherever there is a demand for them. Inquiries may be addressed to M. Kendig at the Institute at Lakeville. *Correspondence Courses*: Negotiations are already under way with the extension divisions of three large universities for the establishment of correspondence courses in semantics, general semantics, and allied fields. On completion of

such negotiations with any of these institutions, announcement will be sent to all members.

Enlarging ETC.: Certain recent savings in printing costs have made it possible for us to contemplate enlarging *ETC.* in the near future. Issues have been running 64 and 80 pages. As soon as possible 80-page issues will be made standard, with an occasional 96-page issue. Special supplementary monographs (of longer works not suitable for magazine publication) are also contemplated.

Bibliography: An extensive bibliography of general semantics is now being prepared by one of our members, a graduate student who has had this project approved as a thesis for an advanced degree. The Society hopes to publish it.

Grants-in-aid: The Society is not yet able to offer grants-in-aid for research purposes. It will, however, offer other forms of aid, such as publicity, putting workers in touch with each other, etc. The Governing Board would like to receive from members suggestions as to how the Society can help members in their research projects.

Cross-Reference Index of General Semantics Literature: The publication of such an index will have to await (like the bibliography) the initiative of members who might wish to produce one. *Reprinting of Back Issues of ETC.:* This has been done in the past. A relatively inexpensive procedure, it is also self-liquidating, usually within a year and a half. Issues most in demand will be reprinted from time to time. *Increasing Frequency of Quote_n:* This is not strongly desired by most members. Publication will be continued to fill gaps between issues of *ETC.* to give news, Society announcements, short articles, etc. *Book Club:* Selections will continue to be made on the basis of merit rather than on the basis of a fixed number of books a year. As members (and therefore sales) increase, special bonuses and reductions are anticipated.

The Governing Board is grateful to all the members who took time to answer the questionnaire and who sent in contributions to strengthen our financial position. The varied and numerous suggestions made by the membership for the more effective functioning of the Society have given the Governing Board a fund of ideas to draw upon for a long time to come. Two small steps were taken which will lessen the burden placed on those who are contributing their time and services to the Society without compensation. A small appropriation was made to reimburse in part the expenses of out-of-town Board members attending Board meetings. Also an appropriation of \$100 an issue to the Editor of *ETC.* was authorized to reimburse him in part for the secretarial expenses he incurs in editing the journal.

KARL G. HAUCH, *Secretary-Treasurer*