

Kurze Geschichte der SOZIOKRATIE

Der Begriff „Soziokratie“ wurde zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts vom französischen Philosophen und Soziologen August Comte geprägt und später vom US-amerikanischen Soziologen Lester Frank Ward erwähnt. Jedoch blieb die Soziokratie eine Theorie, bis der international bekannte Friedensaktivist und Pädagoge Kees Boeke ab 1926 das erste funktionierende soziokratische System entwickelte und in seinem Internat, Werkplaats Kindergemeenschap, als Organisationsform einführte. Der spätere Ingenieur, Gerard Endenburg, geb. 1933 in Holland, hat die Jahre von 1939 – 1945 in dieser, von Kees Boeke und Betty Cadbury gegründeten ersten, soziokratischen Schule verbracht. Basierend auf den Prinzipien Boekes entwickelte Gerard Endenburg für das von seinem Vater übernommene Unternehmen ab 1968 eine Steuerungsmethode (Führungsstruktur), die sog. Soziokratische Kreisorganisationsmethode SKM. Diese war weitreichend verwendbar. Ausgehend vom *Sociocratisch Centrum Nederland*, das Gerard Endenburg 1976 gründete, kam die Soziokratie in den 1980er-Jahren in die USA, nach Südamerika und Canada.

Heute gibt es weltweit unzählige Organisationen, Zentren und Berater-Gruppen, die Soziokratie verbreiten. Sehr bekannt ist die Soziokratie nach Gerard Endenburg in Canada, Brasilien, Frankreich, USA, Indien, Australien, Spanien und Österreich. Ausgehend vom Soziokratie Zentrum Österreich, hielt die Methode ab 2013 auch Einzug in die Schweiz, Deutschland und zuletzt in Griechenland.

Auch Abwandlungen der ursprünglich von Gerard Endenburg entwickelten SKM – Soziokratische Kreisorganisationsmethode wurden entwickelt, wie zB.: Holacracy (Brian Robertson, ab 2006), Sociocracy 3.0 (James Priest, ab 2014), Das kollegial geführte Unternehmen (Bernd Östereich, ab 2016).

Um einen Einblick in die Geschichte der Soziokratie am Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts zu geben, drucken wir hier die englische Kurzfassung eines Pamphlets, dessentwegen Kees Boeke kurz vor dem 2. Weltkrieg beinahe verhaftet worden wäre. Seine Frau, Betty Cadbury-Boeke, veröffentlichte die Kurzfassung nach Kees Boekes Tod, 1966.

Betty Cadbury-Boeke¹ begleitete Gerard Endenburg bis zur Entwicklung der SKM in seinem Unternehmen „Endenburg Elektrotechnik“, bis sie 1976 starb.

Barbara Strauch, November 2019

¹ Buch: BEATRICE The Cadbury Heiress Who Gave Away Her Fortune. Fiona Joseph, 2012, Foxwell Press

Democracy as it might be; first published in May 1945 by Kees Boeke (1884-1966)

(Kees Boeke was the founder of the Werkplaats Community School in Holland, where three of Queen Juliana's children received their early education. At the end of the last war he was imprisoned by the Germans for harbouring Jews, and in his pocket was found a declaration entitled "No Dictatorship", which came near to causing his death. This was a scheme for a kind of democratic society, based on the experience of his school and of the business meetings of the Quakers. This article is a shortened version of his subsequent elaboration of the scheme.)

We are so accustomed to majority rule as a necessary part of democracy that it is difficult to imagine any democratic system working without it. It is true that it is better to count heads than to break them, and democracy, even as it is today, has much to recommend it as compared with former practices. But the party system has proved very far from providing the ideal democracy of people's dreams. Its weaknesses have become clear enough: endless debates in Parliament, mass meetings in which the most primitive passions are aroused, the overruling by the majority of all independent views, capricious and unreliable election results, government action rendered inefficient by the minority's persistent opposition. Strange abuses also creep in. Not only can a party obtain votes by deplorably underhand methods, but, as we all know, a dictator can win an election with an "astonishing" majority by intimidation.

The fact is that we have taken the present system for granted for so long that many people do not realise that the party system and majority rule are not an essential part of democracy. If we really wish to see the whole population united, like a big family, in which the members care for each other's welfare as much as for their own, we must set aside the quantitative principle of the right of the greatest number and find another way of organising ourselves. This solution must be really democratic in the sense that it must enable each one of us to share in organising the community. But this kind of democracy will not depend on power, not even the power of the majority. It will have to be a real community-democracy, an organisation of the community by the community itself.

For this concept I shall use the word "sociocracy". Such a concept would be of little value if it had never been tried out in practice. But its validity has been successfully demonstrated over the years. Anyone who knows England or America will have heard of the Quakers, the Society of Friends. They have had much influence in these countries and are well-known for their practical social work. For more than three hundred years the Quakers have used a method of self-government that rejects majority voting, group action being possible only when unanimity has been reached. I too have found by trying out this method in my school that it really does work, provided there is a recognition that the interests of others are as real and as important as one's own. If we start with this fundamental idea, a spirit of goodwill is engendered which can bind together people from all levels of society and with the most varied points of view. This, my school, with its three to four hundred members, has clearly shown.

As a result of these two experiences I have come to believe that it should be possible some day for people to govern themselves in this way in a much wider field. Many will be highly sceptical about this possibility. They are so accustomed to a social order in which decisions are made by the majority or by a single person, that they do not realise that, if a group provides its own leadership and everyone knows that only when common agreement is reached can any action be taken, quite a different atmosphere is created from that arising from majority rule. These are

two examples of sociocracy in practice; let us hope that its principles may be applied on a national, and finally an international scale.

Before describing how the system could be made to work, we must first see what the problem really is. We want a group of persons to establish a common arrangement of their affairs which all will respect and obey. There will be no executive committee chosen by the majority, having the power to command the individual. The group itself must reach a decision and enter into an agreement on the understanding that every individual in the group will act on this decision and honour this agreement. I have called this the self-discipline of the group. It can be compared to the self-discipline of the individual who has learnt to set certain demands for himself which he obeys.

There are three fundamental rules underlying the system. The first is that the interests of all members must be considered, the individual bowing to the interests of the whole. Secondly, solutions must be sought which everyone can accept: otherwise no action can be taken. Thirdly, all members must be ready to act according to these decisions when unanimously made.

The spirit which underlies the first rule is really nothing else but concern for one's neighbour, and where this exists, where there is sympathy for other people's interests, where love is, there will be a spirit in which real harmony is possible.

The second point must be considered in more detail. If a group in any particular instance is unable to decide upon a plan of action acceptable to every member, it is condemned to inactivity; it can do nothing. This may happen even today where the majority is so small that efficient action is not possible. But in the case of sociocracy there is a way out, since such a situation stimulates its members to seek for a solution, that everyone can accept, perhaps ending in a new proposal, which had not occurred to anyone before. While under the party system disagreement accentuates the differences and the division becomes sharper than ever, under a sociocratic system, so long as it is realised that *agreement* must be reached, it activates a common search that brings the whole group nearer together. Something must be added here. If no agreement is possible, this usually means that the present situation must continue for the time being. It might seem that in this way conservatism and reaction would reign, and no progress would be possible. But experience has shown that the contrary is true. The mutual trust that is accepted as the basis of a sociocratic society leads inevitably to progress, and this is noticeably greater when all go forward together with something everyone has agreed to. Again it is clear that there will have to be "higher-level" meetings of chosen representatives, and if a group is to be represented in such a meeting, it will have to be by someone in whom everyone has confidence. If this does not prove possible, then the group will not be represented at all in the higher-level meeting, and its interests will have to be cared for by the representatives of other groups. But experience has shown that where representation is not a question of power but of trust, the choice of a suitable person can be made fairly easily and without unpleasantness.

The third principle means that when agreement is reached the decision is binding on all who have made it. This also holds of the higher-level meeting for all who have sent representatives to it. There is a danger in the fact that each must keep decisions made in a meeting over which he has only an indirect influence. This danger is common to all such decisions, not least in the party system. But it is much less dangerous where the representatives are chosen by common consent and are therefore much more likely to be trusted.

A group that works in this way should be of particular size. It must be big enough for personal matters to give way to an objective approach to the subject under discussion, but small enough not to be unwieldy, so that the quiet atmosphere needed can be secured. For meetings concerned with general aims and methods a group of about forty has been found the most suitable. But

when detailed decisions have to be made, a small committee will be needed of three to six persons or so. This kind of committee is not new. If we could have a look at the countless committees in existence, we should probably find that those which are doing the best work do so without voting. They decide on a basis of common consent. If a vote were to be taken in such a small group, it would usually mean that the atmosphere is wrong.

Of special importance in exercising sociocratic government is the leadership. Without a proper leader unanimity cannot easily be reached. This concerns a certain technique which has to be learnt. Here Quaker experience is of the greatest value. Let me describe a Quaker business meeting. The group comes together in silence. In front sits the Clerk, the leader of the meeting. Beside him sits the Assistant Clerk; who writes down what is agreed upon. The Clerk reads out each subject in turn, after which all members present, men and women, old and young, may speak to the subject. They address themselves to the meeting and not to a chairman, each one making a contribution to the developing train of thought. It is the Clerk's duty, when he thinks the right moment has come, to read aloud a draft minute reflecting the feeling of the meeting. It is a difficult job, and it needs much experience and tact to formulate the sense of the meeting in a way that is acceptable to all. It often happens that the Clerk feels the need for a time of quiet. Then the whole gathering will remain silent for a while, and often out of the silence will come a new thought, a reconciling solution, acceptable to everyone. It may seem unbelievable to many that a meeting of up to a thousand people can be held in this way. And yet I have been present at a Yearly Meeting of the Quakers in London, held during war-time (the first world war), at which the much vexed problem of the Quaker attitude to war was discussed in such a manner, no vote being taken. So I believe that if we once set ourselves the task of learning this method of co-operation, beginning with very simple matters, we shall be able to learn this art and acquire a tradition which will make possible the handling of more difficult questions.

This has been confirmed by my experience at Bilthoven in building up the school which I called the Children's Community Workshop. Very early on I suggested that we should talk over how we should organise our community life. At first the children objected, saying they wanted me to take the decisions for them. But I insisted, and the idea of the 'Talkover', or weekly meeting, was accepted. Later I suggested that one of the children help me with the leadership of the meeting; and from that time on it has become an institution, led by the children, which we should not like to lose.

When I began to hold these talkovers, I was aware that I was using the procedure of the Quaker business meeting, and I saw in the distance, as it were, the great problem of the government of humanity. It was also curious to discover whether the art of living together, understood as obeying the rule we had all agreed upon, would be simple enough to be learnt by children. An experience of some 20 years has shown me that it certainly is.

But something more is necessary before this method can be applied to adult society. When we are concerned, not with a group of a few hundred people, but with thousands, even millions, whose lives we wish to organise in this way, we must accept the principle of some sort of representation. There will have to be higher level meetings, and these will have to deal with matters concerning a wider area. Higher-level meetings will also have to send representatives to another higher body, which will be responsible for a still wider area, and so on.

After my hopes for the success of school meetings had been confirmed by practice, I was very curious to know if a meeting of representatives would work also in the school. One day when the number of children had grown too large for one general meeting at which all could be present, I suggested the setting up of a meeting of representatives. At first the children did not like the idea; children are conservative. But, as often happens, six months later they suggested

the same plan themselves, and since then this institution has become a regular part of the life of the school.

Of course such meetings, if ever they are to be used by adults for the organisation of society as a whole, will have a very different character from those of our children's community. But how in practice could such methods be introduced? First of all, a Neighbourhood Meeting, made up of perhaps forty families, might be set up in a particular district, uniting those who live near enough to one another so that they could easily meet. In a town it very often happens that people do not even know their neighbours, and it will be an advantage if they are forced to take an interest in those who live close by. The Neighbourhood Meeting might embrace about 150 people, including children. About 40 of these Neighbourhood Meetings might send representatives to a Ward Meeting, acting for something like 6000 people. In general it will be true to say that the wider the area the Meeting governs the less often it will need to meet. The representatives of about 40 Ward Meetings could come together in a District Meeting, acting for about 240,000 people.

In approximately 40 or 50 District Meetings the whole population of a small country might be covered. To a Central Meeting the interests of all the Districts would be brought by their representatives. It is an essential condition that representatives have the confidence of the whole group: if they have that, business can usually be carried on quickly and effectively.

As the whole sociocratic method depends on trust, there will be no disadvantage if, alongside the geographical representation of Neighbourhood, Ward, District and Central Meetings, a second set of functional groupings be established. It seems reasonable that all industries and professions send representatives to primary, secondary and, where necessary, tertiary meetings, and that the trusted representatives of the "workers" in every field should be available to give their professional advice to the government. I have here used the word "government". It is not my intention to put forward a plan according to which the government itself could one day be formed on sociocratic lines. We must start from the present situation, and the only possibility is that, with the government's consent, we make a beginning of the sociocratic method from the bottom upwards; that is, for the present, with the formation of Neighbourhood groups. We, ordinary people, must just learn to talk over our common interests and to reach agreement after quiet consideration, and this can be done best in the place where we live. Only after we have seen how difficult this is, and after, most probably, making many mistakes, will it be possible to set up meetings on a higher level. If leaders should emerge in the Neighbourhood Meetings, their advice would gradually be seen to be useful in the existing Local Councils. Later, in the same way, the advice of leaders of Ward Meetings would be of increasing value.

The sociocratic method must recommend itself by the efficiency with which it works. When the governing power has learnt to trust it enough so as to allow, perhaps even to encourage, the setting up of Neighbourhood Meetings, the system will be able to show what possibilities it has, and then the confidence of the governing bodies and of people at large will have a chance to grow. I can well believe that trusted leaders and representatives of Neighbourhood Meetings may be allowed, or even invited, to attend Local Meetings. These men and women will of course take no part in the voting, for sociocracy does not believe in voting; but they might be allowed a place in the centre between the "left" and the "right". After a time it may even be deemed desirable to ask them for advice about the matter in hand, since it would previously have been discussed in their Neighbourhood Meetings, and a solution sought acceptable to all. It is conceivable that, as confidence grows, certain matters might be handed over to the Neighbourhood Meetings with the necessary funds to carry them out. Only when the value of the new system is realised, could the higher-level meetings be begun.

Is such a development as this a fantasy? When we consider the possible success of government on the sociocratic principle, one thing is certain; it is unthinkable unless it is accompanied and supported by the conscious education of old and young in the sociocratic method. The right kind of education is essential, and here a revolution is needed in our schools. Only latterly have attempts been made in them to further the spontaneous development of the child and encourage his initiative. Partly because the stated aim of the school is to impart knowledge and skills, and partly because people regard obedience as a virtue in itself, children have been trained to obey. We are only beginning to realise the dangers of this practice. If children are not taught to judge for themselves, they will in later life become an easy prey for the dictator. But if we really want to prepare youth to think and act for themselves, we must alter our attitude to education. The children should not be sitting passively in rows, while the schoolmaster drills a lesson into their heads. They should be able to develop freely in children's communities, guided and helped by those who are older acting as their comrades. Initiative should be fostered in every possible way. They should learn from the beginning to do things for themselves, and to make things necessary in their school life. But above all they should learn how to run their own community in some such way as has already been described.

Finally we must return to the question of representation. We have not gone further than the government of our own country. But the great problem of the government of mankind can never be solved on a national basis. Every country is dependent for raw materials and products on other countries. It is therefore inevitable that the system of representation should be extended over a whole continent and representatives of continents join in a World Meeting to govern and order the whole world. Our technical skill in the fields of transport and organisation make something of this kind possible. Finally a World Meeting should invite representatives of all the continents to arrange a reasonable distribution of all raw materials and products, making them available for all mankind. So long as we are ruled by fear and distrust, it is impossible to solve the problems of the world. The more trust grows and the more fear diminishes, the more the problem will shrink.

Everything depends on a new spirit breaking through among men. May it be that, after the many centuries of fear, suspicion and hate, more and more a spirit of reconciliation and mutual trust will spread abroad. The constant practice of the art of sociocracy and of the education necessary for it seem to be the best way in which to further this spirit, upon which the real solution of all world problems depends.

From Beatrice C. Boeke
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