

STIFLING NETWORKING

This is the narrative with documentary evidence on the episode of how, in 2011, there was an attempt by the dnwe-board to discourage networking of dnwe members in Berlin. Not less importantly it also illustrates the authoritarian mindset of some of those in dnwe, their backstabbing and willingness to resort to threats instead of dialogue. The essence is already contained in the narrative, but the documents do provide some further insight and detail, besides, of course, being necessary because of the quasi-legal nature of the allegations.

Comments – in italics – and notes etc. are in square brackets, while paragraphing has been changed for the sake of better readability. There is, inevitably, some slight overlap between the narrative account and the comments on specific sentences in the correspondence.

E-Mail from Martin Priebe early in July (probably 12th) 2011

>> Good morning Mr Gregory,
There are a number of things coming from you that trouble [literally: *alienate*] me a lot. As the person in the Board to be consulted by the regional forums I wish to tell you this and afterwards telephone with you.

In the spring of 2010, Dr. Böhl and Mr Rohde were commissioned by the Board with leading the regional forum Berlin-Brandenburg; prior to this, a number of conversations were held with the Board Chair [Professor Albert Löhr] and me.

Mr Böhl notified me last winter that, due to his personal circumstances, he was temporarily unable to fulfil this task, but that at a later point in time he wishes to become active again. [Note by Cousin Cusanus: *Obviously when he did become a father he realised, to his credit, that paternity involves more time, nerves and energy than he had foreseen.*]

It was then agreed with Mr Rohde that, for the interim, he should assume the leadership of the forum on his own.

[*The role of leader is/was not provided for in the dnwe guidelines for regional forums; rather, a flexible distribution of duties was recommended depending on the availability of the members of the core group. Besides, not only was this*

appointment behind closed doors illegitimate: it was kept absolutely secret. Cusanus does not even know if it is exactly true. Holger Rohde, with whom Cusanus had had pleasant if somewhat anodyne interaction until this e-mail, has kept silent. Allegedly a Christian, he gave the impression of being unusually well-read about contemporary ethics. Disappointingly, being moderately knowledgeable about the books (and theories) in fashion is, in this case, evidently something quite different being candid where candour is required.]

However welcome it may be that, in practical matters, you and Mr Wihlenda are active in Berlin: After consulting Mr Rohde, I am unable to assume that you have consulted with him in this respect. *[The man had undertaken to organise something, and then done nothing for more than six months, not even sent an apology or explanation for his inaction. Prior to this, he had been one of those in the preparatory meetings seeking to complicate matters and procrastinate. He failed to keep his word to appear at the final preparatory meeting, organised by Cusanus on Monday June 28 and attended by Cusanus only at great inconvenience. Non-members of dnwe who did attend drew their own conclusions. Again and again, dnwe has driven away people of quality!]*

There is for the moment [i.e. as yet, still] no authority (“Mandat”) for your activity. *[The name dnwe says that it is a network, not a hierarchy!]*

Perhaps it would be a solution, if you in Berlin, as we practice successfully in the Baden-Württemberg forum, develop a leadership team in which you and Mr Wihlenda and possibly further dnwe members might become active together.

[Total exasperation: This is exactly what we had done!]

But please in coordination with the regional forum, otherwise you split the work and the members on location. *[At the risk of being repetitive: Four members met several times – Böl, Rohde, Wihlenda and Cusanus – good locations always organised by the latter. The first two were commissioned, at their behest, by the last two to organise a venue and a meeting for all fifty or so members in the Berlin region. They failed to do so. All that this – psychologically sick – duo did, according to Martin Priebe, was to get themselves secretly put in charge of the*

regional group, although the dnwe guidelines did not provide for any such position of leadership.]

As a matter of form, I remind you here that since Spring 2010 there have been guidelines for the regional forums, that were agreed as such by all the heads of the regional forums. [*Maybe. Pity that others did not abide by them, even though the guidelines were not publicised within dnwe! Notwithstanding which, dnwe is supposed to be a network, so why the fixation on hierarchy?*]

The rules for Internet work are also set out there. The regional forums should present their work on the DNWE website. The line pursued in the DNWE internet work has always been to avoid any fragmentation in the picture presented by dnwe, and therefore not to allow any websites by the regional forums.

[*Protest: When Cusanus co-founded dnwe in 1993 with some fourteen others, **it was not directed at constituting a political party or a pressure – lobby – group, but at the creation of a forum for the exchange of ideas about and, if possible, initiatives on business ethics.** Martin Priebe – and his allies – have clearly chosen to subvert this ideal. Priebe is invited to explain how his interpretation conforms with the statutes of the association, a task he will likely measure up to just as little as he has measured up to any other democratic and legally constituted matter.*]

I was somewhat surprised that you and Mr Wihlenda created facts without consulting the dnwe Board (cf. www.dnwe-berlin.de). I find this very annoying. [*Networks are not hierarchies, but see above.*]

I find even more annoying your comments on DNWE on your private website www.csr-skepsis.de. [*Pleased to hear it and finally get some feedback.*]

Under the pseudonym “Cusanus” not only do you, in my opinion, violate Internet law (no personal details in the imprint, no legal assertions/disclaimers pursuant to the TDK act – German law on telecommunications data, etc.).

[*Here Martin Priebe is wrong on a point of law, at least at it stood at the time. He assumes that the website was intended to generate income, and presumably cannot imagine that someone might publish for reasons of conviction. The material has been*

updated and transferred to www.contra-dnwe.de. The website *CSR-Skepsis.de* continues as a critical voice on the subject of CSR.

“Cusanus” is primarily a literary device, intended not least to avoid the egomania omnipresent in today’s world. But it was also chosen as a precaution because the author feared negative effects on his business for speaking out against the abuse of the concept CSR.]

You criticise DNWE anonymously, and do this at some points in a manner that I do not consider appropriate.

[It was fairly easy to ascertain the authorship, for example, by sending an e-mail, which would normally reveal the identity of the enquirer and establishing contact on an equal footing. As demonstrated in the reasoning written by Professor Joachim Fetzer in June 2013 for excluding Cusanus, and published in translation and in the original elsewhere on this website, some individuals in DNWE are themselves seriously unwilling to be identified, preferring to make their inarticulate attacks really anonymously.]

Quite apart from legal aspects, that is no kind of “signboard” for those active in our regional forums. *[Not that in twenty years the regional forums have ever achieved anything, or even sustained continuity.]*

As part of the current strategy process, DNWE has established an intranet forum under dnwe.de, something that should not have remained hidden from you as a member.

[This was far too late – many years later than possible – and long after the relevant comments were posted under CSR-Skepsis; besides the intranet forum was afterwards subject to censorship by the unelected Professor Monika Eigenstetter, who also ensured there was no archiving of criticism.]

I ask myself why you do not place your very extensive comments on various aspects of DNWE there, where the discussion of the members now takes place, but rather in the public arena and then anonymously?

[I did! Or rather, I attempted to place my comments there: one title of a pdf was renamed, presumably to disguise its subject matter; and all were subsequently removed – not archived – by

the censor Professor Monika Eigenstetter. Details elsewhere on contra-dnwe.de.]

With your criticism you may well point to certain weaknesses of DNWE. Your fundamental criticism that DNWE does not conduct itself according the ethical principles is without any foundation. *[This is a mere assertion, failing to answer the very extensive and detailed charges laid against dnwe. Moreover, Cusanus is not aware of using the expression “ethical principles” except to criticise this approach to ethics as a law-like structure.]*

It is curiously exactly the other way round: With your “silent” [literally: “cold”] takeover of the leadership of the regional forum in Berlin and with your Skepsis website you violate fundamental rules of conduct between people and also violate basic ethical principles.

[The latter themes are discussed at length on my various websites and were also briefly on the dnwe intranet site, until the dnwe-censor intervened. These are not concepts that Martin Priebe or other leading past or present members of dnwe have ever cared to analyse, preferring to leave them as articles of faith, articles of faith that are never articulated. The allegation about Cusanus taking over the leadership “cold” contradicts all the facts, reported and documented above and elsewhere on contra-dnwe, quite apart from which the express ethical position of Cusanus is to reject the need for leadership, as distinct from coordination. Indeed, it is exactly the other way around: if the report by Martin Priebe is to be believed, Rohde and Böl themselves sought to engineer an underhand takeover.]

I shall be pleased to cite some of these, that I see as being massively violated.

[Please do!]

I can be available to you for a conversation this week Wednesday 13.7.2011, in the morning, or Thursday 14.7.2011, 14.30 – 17.30. You can reach me under – I can then call you back from a fixed-line number.

Friendly greetings [!]

Martin Priebe <<

Martin Priebe – Consultancy & Training
Name of road and house number, 70378 Stuttgart
[a long way from Berlin]
Phone number, Facsimile number
Mail martin@priebe-beratung.de

>> From: DNWE (Fetzer) [<mailto:fetzer@dnwe.de>]

Sent: Monday, 11 July 2011 19:16

To: priebe@dnwe.de

Subject: DNWE Jour Fixe Wednesday, 13 July

Dear Martin,

in case you have not seen this, I am forwarding this invitation to DNWE-Berlin.

Please also do not fail to look at the website www.csr-skepsis.de in which, under the pseudonym Cusanus, Paul Gregory discusses DNWE dissolving itself.

Many greetings,

Joachim

<<

Cousin Cusanus cannot now remember what happened with the phone call. He believes he was so disgusted by the arrogance and authoritarian tone of Martin Priebe, that he refrained from responding. It is notable that particular timeslots were proposed, which did not and do not conform to the lifestyle of Cusanus, who is available many hours a day and most days, but not for scheduling days in advance.

People who work to tight schedule invariably turn out not to have thought out the matters properly, they always try to muddle through with platitudes and untruths, and often change the schedule. Serious exchange would be feasible in writing, but these people are never serious. Realising this, these people love to keep the exchanges at a level where they cannot be reliably quoted and their utterances are not open to public scrutiny.

Cousin Cusanus mailed the members of the Kuratorium, which is the advisory board of dnwe, appointed in secret by persons unknown according to undisclosed criteria, in order to inform

them of this breach of the fundamental rules of conduct between people and ethical principles, but they failed to respond.

The members addressed (excepted one deceased) were: Michael Behrent, Ursula Hansen, Caspar von Hauenschild, Michael Heinrich, Andreas Pohlmann, Luc Van Liedekerke, Josef Wieland and Horst Steinmann.

Fast forward now to the end of the year. Cusanus remembers returning late from a pre-Christmas celebration with colleagues (fellow translators, whose ethical standards are markedly higher than those found at dnwe) and finding an e-mail from Priebe that Cusanus was too tired to read, then being woken shortly after eight on the Saturday morning by an unusual call from a friend, the ex-manager G. in Bremen. It transpired that Priebe had realised he had gone too far and wanted to retract the tone of his (following) letter, but did not quite dare to phone himself. Cusanus cannot now remember exactly how events unfolded, but at any rate under the intercession of the man from Bremen he signalled willingness to phone, a willingness that was immediately misrepresented by Priebe with customary arrogance as if it were Cusanus who wished to phone him rather than the other way around.

All Cusanus can remember of the phone call is that it was substantially one-sided with Priebe recounting his vita (e.g. where he had worked and who he had studied with, including some name-dropping of prominent professors Cusanus does not hold in high regard).

Before coming to the translation of this second letter from Martin Priebe, we take a break for a related matter.

The story with Priebe is only one facet of a mosaic, giving a composite picture of an “ethics” association whose leading members indignantly plead the high moral ground while in fact exhibiting behaviour which falls far short of the common decencies found in every other organisation Cusanus has ever known. In his letter Priebe mentions a former board member who, although only a most marginal figure in this report, betrays a viciousness that exceeds all the rest. This correspondence also provides a parallel documentary account of other quite scandalous happenings which are narrated elsewhere.

The friendly text below was sent by Cusanus on 05.12.2011 in response to a letter that Daniel Dietzfelbinger had sent, uninvited, but fair enough, to all several hundred dnwe members, in which he expressed justified concern at developments in the network. Read on for his astonishing reply.

>> Dear Dr. Dietzfelbinger,
It is worse than you suppose.

Already in the run-up to the AGM I had asked Dr. Löhr to send to the members a protest letter I had written. This letter as well as the wording of his refusal is meanwhile on one of my private websites (see below).

I had also immediately reacted critically to the Powerpoint presentation of the board, but was only able to reach a very few with my letter, since I did not have an up-to-date membership list. The name of a key file that I had submitted (“Critique of the Roland-Berger study”) had been altered, without my consent, so that its subject matter was no longer apparent. Furthermore, this and other files I had submitted were presented in the Intranet such that it was hardly possible to spot them.

I have put a great deal of work into these analyses as also into constructive proposals. In response I have met systematically with censorship and marginalisation.

Furthermore, there is a remarkable story to do with the regional forum in Berlin, a matter that Herr Priebe in particular must answer for. On this subject, too, there is a report (with the wording of the letter from Herr Priebe) on my website.

There are many opinions or estimations of yours that I do not share, but that is something one can talk about. I am pleased that you, too, have recognised the unfortunate state of the network. The report to you personally in advance. I shall report at the given time to all members.

Friendly greetings

Paul Gregory

Phone number

www.CSR-Skepsis.de <<

Note that in his reply Dr. Dietzfelbinger fails to reply to any of the matters in the above letter:

>> Dear Herr Gregory,

I notify you that I do not wish to be brought into association with your suppositions and speculations. I share neither your methods (publication of personal mails, etc.) nor your suppositions/conspiracy theories. [*This is pure slander by Dr. Dietzfelbinger. Note that he has never attempted to substantiate his assertions.*]

My letter of December 5, 2011, was directed at providing information, not conspiracy. [*Nothing else was ever insinuated.*]

For all events, I instruct you that any publication of my name on your website – including my letter – will be taken up by my lawyer.

[*Dr. Dietzfelbinger originally contacted Cusanus, and hundreds of others, in a public matter without having been invited to do so. His present letter is not conceivably private since Cusanus has never consented to receiving private communications from Dr. Dietzfelbinger, let alone having consented to receiving threats. There is no conceivable misrepresentation of Dietzfelbinger here. Dr. Dietzfelbinger's email is not a love letter, which might have enjoyed the discretion of privacy. If Dr. Dietzfelbinger chooses to send unsolicited emails on a matter being discussed in the public domain, he must expect to be named and has no legal or moral right to anonymity. Any lawyer taking up contact in this matter will be charged by Cusanus with intimidation and abuse of his/her professional status.*]

If any connection should be made between your suppositions and my letter, I reserve the right to take legal measures. [*None was ever even thought of. The threat is likely bluster, but nonetheless, it betrays a menacing and authoritarian mindset which is quite inappropriate for anyone engaged in an ethics association or seeking, for instance, to give advice or instruction in ethics.*]

I request a short acknowledgement of the receipt of my mail. [*When no acknowledgement was sent by return, Dr. Dietzfelbinger wrote again, so his shameful outburst was not a momentary lapse of judgement.*]

Friendly greetings [!]

Daniel Dietzfelbinger <<

Message to Dr Daniel Dietzfelbinger:
You do not need a lawyer. You need a therapist.

Need more be said about the moral quality of this former member of the dnwe board?

Well, a little maybe. If Cusanus remembers correctly, it was he who addressed an evening meeting held in Berlin in the autumn of 2001 on the premises of a reputable pharmaceutical company and that was attended by many, maybe 150 persons. It was a rare example of an opportunity to capitalise on the groundswell of interest in business ethics.

Cusanus remembers scolding a speaker, who he believes was Daniel Dietzfelbinger, after the presentation for having spoken at great length in a manner which will certainly have been incomprehensible to most of the well-educated people attending, and indeed was thoroughly unhelpful for anyone interested in the subject rather than rhetoric. The scolding was, needless to say, not received graciously.

There has never since been any such meeting in Berlin that was even remotely so well-attended. **Another example of a missed opportunity under the auspices of the closed and arrogant circle that run dnwe.**

Now we come to Martin Priebe's letter, which takes its cue from that of Daniel Dietzfelbinger.

>> I can only accord fully with the substance of what Mr Dietzfelbinger has said. If you continue to make assertions casting aspersions on my honour and without any truth about me among the members of dnwe, you must also be prepared that I too shall turn to a lawyer. Until now I had assumed that in an ethics network we could approach each other in a trusting and moderate manner. Your most recent mail, that I have attached to this letter, causes me, regrettably, to see this precondition move far into the distance: You are in the grey area of wanton slander, Mr Gregory. [*Unable to retrieve the email concerned, but I would not have written anything that is untrue, hence I assert that the statement of Martin Priebe is itself slanderous.*] I am a patient and well-

disposed man – but I shall not take this from you in future without further action.

I again propose that we telephone. Feel free to call me under – I can then call you back and am prepared to discuss matters with you. I already offered this in my previous emails [*only one is known to Cusanus*], but regrettably you did not respond, but have reacted in mails [*please send copies, no memory or record of these*] in a manner that, in my opinion, does not correspond to the usual etiquette of communication. I appeal to you not to do the same again: Then my patience would be at an end. As you can see from the spontaneous reaction of Mr Dietzfelbinger there are people who have less patience than me.

I find it regrettable that until now **you have only talked or written about me, and not with me.** [*See the letter below. Why should Cousin Cusanus engage in dialogue with an egomaniac? Besides, Cusanus is unaware of having talked or written about Martin Priebe, only about his attempts illicitly to wield power and influence.*]

Give us both a chance to get to know each other and exchange ideas – just phone me (I tried it just now, unfortunately without success.)

I wish you good evening and good night from Stuttgart.
Martin Priebe <<

And now we have my courteous reply to which Priebe did not bother to reply:

>> Good morning Mr Priebe,
I received your email late in the evening after returning from a Christmas dinner with members of my professional organisation (BDÜ). Today Mr G____ phoned me shortly before 9 am in connection with your communication or call to him.

I do not wish – I did not wish – to go into this matter this week in any detail.

I am not aware of any untrue assertions on my part, though certainly by others.

I see myself in the first place as representing the public interest in ethics – and here in particular business ethics (my familiarity with – for example – medical ethics is much less pronounced). That is: for me dnwe was from the beginning a

means to an end and never an end in itself. Moreover, I distinguish strictly between ethics and politics.

It is noticeable that generally, and not only between you and me, the most various conceptions exist about the function of dnwe. But, regrettably, also about what is actually to be understood by *ethics*. (The statutes do not say much.)

These are matters one can discuss. So far, the board of dnwe has not been prepared to do this.

If now there is a change in attitude either on your part or on the part of others, then it is possible to begin a straightforward exchange that looks to the future. But this must not remain a purely private correspondence.

At this point I could marshal further thoughts. On the other hand, I have discussed, at the one point or the other, my fundamental assumptions rather exhaustively in many carefully crafted essays and also in e-mails, mostly well-thought out. Others are free to adopt these or else to criticise them. I am also willing in principle to publish such criticism – if wished – alongside my comments.

I see your threat to involve a lawyer as mean-minded bluster, as if you would now regret having written what you wrote in July. On the other hand, you are free to retract this and apologise to those affected. But more important still, in my opinion, would be if you arrived at a different understanding of ethics. A core point of my own conception is that ethics begins where the rules break down. (The law is such a system of rules.)

(Look forward to the essay that I was busy writing when this story imposed itself on me: *Invective against the other right extremism [play on words in German, where Recht means law but also right-wing]*)

I shall report separately about DD.

Except for a couple of bcc copies to my closest allies I am sending this mail only to you. But you are invited – indeed, urged – to forward it to others who are possibly interested or affected.

That is the end of this message from Berlin. <<

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Long afterwards, in Spring 2013 Cousin Cusanus attended, hesitantly, the opening of the new dnwe office in Berlin, in order to observe what these creeps were up to and what sorts they were associating with. At one point he was approached by Martin Priebe as if we were the best of friends. Cousin Cusanus declined to shake hands. This might have been possible, or appropriate, at the end of a discussion, but not at the beginning, seeing what had gone before. Martin Priebe did not stay to engage in dialogue. It would, in any case, have been the wrong moment.

This has been one demonstration of how, even if intermingled with other topics, those in the ascendancy of dnwe have sought to constrain and control mere members from communicating with each other.

A later event is also worth the retelling. It must have been late in 2012 that Dr. Christian Hofmann invited local members to a remote corner of Berlin (although Cusanus was known to have a central venue available). Cousin Cusanus arrived a little late, and discovered a seminar under way modelled along familiar lines. It involved Dr. Hofmann telling everyone what business ethics was (i.e. what it most certainly is not) and organising discussion in a “consensual” way such that alternative approaches were stifled.

When Cousin Cusanus could bear no more of the infantilism he left and later posted on the dnwe intranet a satirical piece about the kindergarten. This caused offense. It was meant to. It is probably one of the incidents Professor Fetzer referred to in his defamatory commentary of May 2013.

Hofman had wasted the time of Cusanus by issuing an invitation to an event where it was impossible to network and exchange ideas. It is obvious that Hofman, who would seem to hope to earn his living from conducting seminars, needed some victims to practice on. It speaks volumes for the quality of the people dnwe attracts that the others seem to have swallowed this.

Of the various shady characters Cusanus came to know in connection with dnwe (EBEN), Hofman has proved to have a core of decency about him, in stark contrast, for example, with Monika Eigenstetter. Nonetheless, this horse too fell at an early hurdle.