

We Have To Serve the People

Felix Unger, President of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts

Felix Unger, president of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, is a Club of Rome member. Yoshi Nagaoka, Seikyo Shimbun staff writer, and Jeff Farr, World Tribune associate editor, talked with him about various topics at the Club of Rome's annual conference in Ponce, Puerto Rico, on Dec. 1, 1996.

WT: We heard that you visited Soka University and the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum.

FU: Last July I went to the university and the art museum. I must tell you that it was a wonderful experience. Frankly, I am very proud to have received the highest honor of your university. I think that the movement of the Soka Gakkai in these days we are facing now is very, very important.

I think we are all called upon to stand together and work together for a wonderful future. We have a future when we have a heart that functions well. From your heart you can reach out and you can stand together.

What I was so impressed about from the SGI is that you are putting importance, very strongly, on values. I think that this is the main uniting thing in the whole world — when people can work together on the basis of values.

WT: We were impressed by your statement at this conference that to do global revolution we have to change as individuals first. It's pretty much what SGI President Ikeda discussed with Club of Rome founder Aurelio Peccei in the book they published together, *Before It Is Too Late*.

They both used the same term, *human revolution*, saying only it can be the beginning of global revolution. What do you think about the potential of human revolution — to change individual lives first — toward affecting the rest of the world?

FU: I would say that the main danger for man is himself. I am very often asked when and who should start. And I say always: "I have to start myself. And I have to start immediately."

Only when you are doing things in the proper way can you motivate people to do it also in the proper way. I think it's very useless if you call on other people to make changes. We have the responsibility, and we have to start by ourselves.

WT: We appreciate that your academy has offered an honorary membership to our president. What do you think of President Ikeda's activities throughout the world?

FU: We asked President Ikeda to become an honorary senator of our academy. This is the highest award we give. And it is in recognition of the fact that he is the president of a very, very important society. As I told you before, I think that we share the same ideas, based on values.

For us, as a European academy, it's very helpful to have somebody from the other side of the world so that we can demonstrate that we are bridging, that we are sharing ideas. As more people agree to share the same ideas, I think that we are going to build for our children a livable future.

WT: How can an organization like the SGI contribute to globalism?

FU: An organization like the SGI can tremendously help and assist people. Don't forget that in the world's governments we need a lot of ideas born from NGOs [nongovernmental organizations recognized by the United Nations].

The problem is — how I see it in Europe — that at the present time we have a political system, with the presidents and the prime ministers and so on, that always comes down to [the politicians becoming overly concerned with getting elected again]. And elections are spoiling the ideas that people need in their daily lives. I think an organization like the SGI or our academy is extremely important to show that we are working for people and that we have the interests of the human being in the center of our lives.

WT: What kind of experience did you have that brought you to the conclusion that “I have to change first”?

FU: It was a very awful experience. In fact, I am a typical pupil of the classical medical schools. In all our medical schools we learned a lot of facts, but we did not learn what man is, who we are treating, what an illness is, what it means to be a doctor and so on. When I became a professor and the chairman of my own clinic, I detected immediately that I had an enormous responsibility.

I realized that what I am doing, what my associates are doing, what I do with my patients and also what I have to offer as education for my students, what I have to tell them, is so important. And I saw in my life then that I had to motivate my students to be doctors. It was completely clear.

I have to make now this statement: We need natural science as a principle on which to base medicine. In other words, medicine is not only the selection and composition of facts; medicine is much more.

We have to pull together all our sciences to make them serve man. We have to serve man. This is the key issue which we did not learn in our medical schools. We learned that man is an object, which is completely wrong.

When you treat a patient, you need ethics. For me the greatest idea is for doctors to protect the patients. I went really crazy with this idea. I am always saying we have to see the patient as a subject. And we have to serve the patient.

WT: President Ikeda has been conducting a dialogue with doctors and nurses, “Buddhism and the Art of Medicine,” which has been running in the *World Tribune*. He is saying the same thing; he is arguing that doctors and nurses need to be more humanistic about how they treat their patients.

FU: For me what he's stating is completely true. Medicine, do not forget, is an art. You must have a correct attitude being an artist in this discipline because you have to serve and you have to understand the people and their problems, their environment. Don't forget, one of the main tasks of medicine is to serve humans, to cure them when they are ill, to assist them in coming back to society. And when it is not possible anymore, when destiny is coming, you have to help them to die with dignity.

WT: Many of our members don't know what your institute is about. Could you give us some background?

FU: The academy was founded after a long preparation on March 7, 1990. As I told you before, I was driven to form this academy by my misled studies in medicine.

This is the thinking behind the academy: When we are discussing the sciences we have to take into account that they are not just medical or mathematical sciences — you have much more.

And, in fact, we see that we have three types of sciences. One type is the relation of man to nature. From this is derived the natural sciences, the technical sciences and the environmental sciences.

Then you have the relation among people, the so-called inter-human relations. [This includes] the social sciences, the historical sciences, the language sciences, the trade sciences, jurisprudence and so on. And of course medicine is a typical example of the social sciences.

And then you have man's relation to the spiritual things, the metaphysical things. There you have philosophy, the arts and of course religion.

In this area we find a similarity between our academy and the Soka Gakkai. This is because the Soka Gakkai sees the world with the human being as the central interest and agrees that we have to serve humans.

When we are speaking among other religions — and I am Catholic — then we have a shared basis from our shared values. This way we can build a future for our children.

WT