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ACS not responding, says Goldsworthy Featured

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Ashley Goldsworthy: Not happy, Ian

Senior Australian Computer Society member Professor Ashley Goldsworthy has unloaded on new ACS President Dr Ian Oppermann for what he says is a 'lack of leadership and courage'.

Professor Goldsworthy's comments were made in an interview with iTWire in which he expressed his frustration at the ACS's lack of action over serious concerns he and others have raised about the organisation's direction. They believe the ACS is becoming too commercial and ignoring the interests of its members.

Always outspoken, Professor Goldsworthy has publicly expressed his concerns previously (/it-industry/industry-heavyweight-unloads-on-acs.html). He told iTWire he hoped that things would change after Dr Oppermann's election as President in March, but that he is now very concerned that they will not.

"It seems to me Dr Oppermann has become a captive of the ACS Management Committee and a prisoner of his own weakness or unwillingness to act. He as shown absolutely no real positive action to address our fundamental concerns. All we have seen is a lot of empty words and diversionary tactics."

Professor Goldsworthy is a leading member of a group of dissident senior ACS members which calls itself the 'Rescue your ACS' movement', but he stresses that his views are his own and not those of the group.

These views carry some weight, given his background with the ACS. He was three times elected President and has also served as CEO, the only person to hold both positions.

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He served 27 years on the ACS National Council and was ACS representative to the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) for 18 years, and became its World President. Is also a former Treasurer of the Liberal Party and has been awarded an AO and an OBE for services to the industry.

"During the last decade a small group has taken advantage of provisions in the existing ACS rules to centralise power in the Management Committee and dominate the society, " Professor Goldsworthy says. "They have maintained control because, among the thousands of ACS members, the Management Committee's ten members are elected only by the 24 members of the ACS Congress.

"Each time a position on the Management Committee falls vacant, only about 40 of the thousands of members are eligible to stand as candidates for election, and only about a dozen for the role of President."

He says that in recent years services to members have been reduced. "Branch Committees in the states and territories are now denied access to funds and have no control over local staff," he says.

"Large amounts of money are being spent on showpiece premises in Barangaroo in Sydney and Docklands in Melbourne, on industry development, on officials travelling overseas, on sponsoring overseas visits by politicians, and on business networking opportunities for office-holders."

Professor Goldsworthy points out that the number of Professional Members of the ACS has declined by more than half over the last decade. The ACS does not publish detailed membership figures, but does not dispute a breakdown shared earlier this year (/it-industry/acs-critic-circulates-more-detailed-membership-numbers.html)with iTWire by dissident branch members.

"The Society now has more non-professional members than it has Professional Members. The ACS publishes membership numbers that are swollen by overseas and 'professional year' members, who are only given membership as part of the ACS monopoly on accreditation, and by subscribers to the only remaining trade-journal publication.

"It seems to me the ACS sees Professional Members not as the reason for the Society's existence, but as a liability. As the TV show 'Yes Minister' once put it, 'a hospital runs much more efficiently without any patients'.

"During 2019, the ACS Executive proposed a replacement constitution that would have permanently removed the ability of members to exercise control over their own Society. A nine person board would have been granted total control, with the power to ensure that the directors were replaced by like-minded people.

"The agenda was not services to the members, nor to the public, but rather commercialisation," Professor Goldsworthy told iTWire. "Once membership had declined far enough, a future board would be in position to privatise the assets and revenue-flows. ACS it is destined to stand for Assembly of Commercial Services."

In late 2019 the 'Rescue Your ACS' movement, led by Dr Roger Clarke and in which Goldsworthy is involved, almost defeated the motion at the General Meeting to approve the replacement constitution.

The group lost by only a single vote, which was in any case annulled after the result was thrown out by a judge (/it-industry/acs-loses-major-court-battle-over-irregular-vote.html) after the group took the ACS to court over significant irregularities in how the vote was called and counted. The subsequent judgement against the ACS was scathing.

The vote was overturned, and the Extraordinary General Meeting at which it was held declared invalid. The judgement was extremely critical of the behaviour of ACS leadership and awarded costs against the ACS totalling $275,000. Professor Goldsworthy said he estimates the ACS has to date wasted over $1 million of members' funds on legal costs over the matter.

"On 19 June 2020 Dr Clarke made a 30 minute presentation to the ACS Congress on what the Rescue your ACS group saw as the way ahead," says Professor Goldsworthy. "I'm extremely disappointed with the report of the President on that meeting. Dr Oppermann's comments give me little confidence of significant changes being implemented."

Both Dr Clarke's presentation and Dr Oppermann's response were reported in iTWire. (/it-industry/is-acs-reconciliation-possible.html)

"The key recommendation by the Rescue Group was the establishment of a Task Force under an independent chair with wide representation. This very sensible suggestion was rejected.

"Instead Dr Oppermann said, 'Rather than starting again, changes will be made to the 2019 draft constitution. For example, the 2019 draft said the term limit of the constitution would be six years; we'll be changing that to a lifetime term.' Big deal! This is a clear sign decisions have already been made before any sham consultations."

Professor Goldsworthy pointed out that Dr Clarke attempted to nominate for President in March 2020 but was blocked by the ACS Congress (/it-industry/oppermann-unopposed-as-acs-president-%E2%80%93-clarke-ruled-ineligible.html). "Incredible as it may seem, on 9 April, 2020 he was again blocked by the ruling members from nominating for Vice-President.

"I was also blocked by the ruling members from standing for office. Tammany Hall reigns supreme," he said, a reference to a notorious US political machine. Professor Goldsworthy said the reform group wants significant changes to the ACS rules and regulation to ensure the members regain control.

"They need to become more accountable, transparent and responsive. I sent Dr Oppermann and the CEO a series of questions on 11 March 2020 querying several major questionable financial decisions of the executive in the past 12 months.

"Despite Dr Oppermann saying he would respond, I have not heard a peep from him in the intervening four months. Apart from being rude and discourteous, it smacks of arrogance or condescension. I take it as an irrefutable sign of Dr Oppermann's failure to act."

Nevertheless, Goldsworthy said the Rescue Group was in it for the long haul and remained optimistic of achieving its goals.

iTWire has issued invitations to both Dr Oppermann and Dr Clarke to respond to Professor Goldsworthy's comments.

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