

#1110 -- 1111 W. Hastings
Vancouver 1, B. C.
April 14, 1969

Mr. H. M. Evans
Secretary of Senate
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby 2, B. C.

RECEIVED

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REGISTRAR'S OFFICE

3:25 PM

Dear Mr. Evans:

I regret my inability to attend the Senate meeting tonight. Normally that would be the end of my association with a particular meeting because I feel the expression of one's views in written form at a meeting because of absence is quite improper. The paper should be previously circulated.

In this instance, the marked shortness of time makes such a course impossible. Thus, should Senate discuss its procedures, the members might be asked if they would care to hear the views herein expressed. *They should be warned that reading time is about 9 minutes - which is too long!*

Some of the criticism directed at Senate's inability to process material is unfair. The policies and procedures of most universities have developed gradually over a score of years or more; Simon Fraser must try to produce an equivalent set of decisions applicable to its peculiar circumstances in a far shorter period of time. The quantity of decision-making is enormous, our body of historical precedent is being built concurrently, and thus much that needs doing must be delayed to a later date even if Senate were functioning effectively.

But Senate is not functioning effectively. Why this is so, and the way in which it might function more effectively is the principal purpose of this letter.

I believe certain procedural weaknesses, and certain personal attitudes, are responsible for the malaise of Senate. Procedurally, the following are significant:

- (a) We often allow considerable discussion before any specific motion is placed before us. In effect, this means the meeting is discussing nothing specific, so confusion can hardly be avoided.
- (b) Our motions often call for approval of a lengthy and complicated report and discussion takes place on all aspects of the report simultaneously. We should require reports to be drafted, or redrafted, so discussion can take place *seriatim* on individual points.
- (c) Many times each meeting we allow completely improper and/or irrelevant questions of privilege and points of order to interrupt debate.

I turn now to the way in which I feel the personal attitudes of those around our table have shaped our present situation. Some will call this dealing in personalities. However, if hundreds of groups about our size, in and out of academia, successfully operate their meetings and we don't, it seems obvious that a major factor must be the manner of our own participation.

In this regard, by far most important is the weakness and ineffectiveness of the presiding officer's role. In part this reflects personality, in part a philosophy inconsistent with that role and, in large part, a willingness by the majority of the present Senate to avoid decision in any situation where differences of opinion, even minor differences, exist. The alternative, so far rejected in practice, is for Senate to accept leadership and reach a decision which may be wrong and which does not carry universal approval but to reach that decision in a reasonably direct, straightforward manner with limited debate.

Senate is only in part a parliament where discussion at length is basic.

Most of the decisions required of Senate smack of the administrative process, a process of trial and error in which it is more important that a rational decision based on a reasonable assortment of knowledge be reached in ten cases than that a rational decision based on every last iota of opinion and knowledge be reached in one case. This requires strong leadership---a willingness on the part of the presiding officer to allow his own opinion of when debate has progressed to the point where reasonable pro and con opinion has been expressed to prevail, and then to use the force of his personality and the power of his office to bring the assembly to a quick decision. This will certainly cut off some who wish to enter the debate, and if the assembly feels that unfairness is being exhibited, there are procedural ways to restrain the chairman. My point is, however, that so far with neither of our presidents have we seen any consistent attempt (particularly with Dr. Strand) to shorten debate by such perfectly valid measures as refusing to see a succession of speakers on one side when the contrary side has exhausted its support or by refusing to allow speakers to speak several times, either directly or by some procedural pretext.

Equally conducive to repetitious argument is the practice of delaying the presentation of a motion which would bring a subject to a vote because the chairman has a list of other people who would like to participate in the debate. The very purpose of the motion is to cut off debate, and the meeting should decide such a point immediately a senator asks it to do so.

In short, it is my view that in the sort of body which constitutes the Senate, a perceptive chairman can, and should, exercise much more leadership and authority than has been shown to date to bring debate to an intelligent conclusion. To do this, he will have to accept the responsibility, and Senate will have to support him, for arbitrarily eliminating a good deal of perfectly intelligent comment and debate. This last point should be emphasized because much which is eliminated, while it is probably repetitious, is nonetheless sensible, sound, and may well contain a further thought or two. However, I would rather bath four or five babies reasonably well than scrub the same one endlessly for fear of throwing him out with the bathwater.

My second point concerns the tendency of Senate to be played for suckers by the two student senators who have informed us they despise us, plan our destruction, and will not accept the normal rules of a body such as ours. These two student senators are perfectly free, in my view, to express such

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opinion and to initiate---with initiate emphasized---whatever course of action they wish. It amazes me, however, that so many faculty members play the dissidents' game by accepting obviously unreasonable motions seriously, debating them at length, and using up valuable time in the process.

I believe the two student senators in question have had little to do with Senate's present impotence; we would probably have achieved this without their aid. Nonetheless, we contribute nothing to the democratic tradition and we make ourselves little less than fools in the eyes of the community by seriously debating at length the completely impossible propositions they advance.

I suggest strongly that senators who are prepared to vote for such Conway-Corbin motions as opening Simon Fraser to highschool failures, academic rejects from other universities, American draftdodgers without academic qualifications for university entrance, and so on, or for a parallel Senate half-students half-faculty, the decisions of which we would automatically undertake to approve---I suggest that those senators who would vote for these things should by all manner of means speak in their support.

Unless such support is forthcoming in substantial measure, and Senator Sperling by himself in my opinion does not constitute substantial measure, senators' silence would soon bring a vote to decide such matters in accepted democratic fashion.

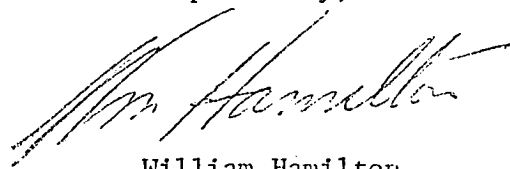
Third, and finally, we have among our Senate members a limited number who occupy a completely disproportionate amount of time.

Excluding those who use every opportunity to intervene in debate as deliberately destructive tactics, we have several senators who intervene far more frequently than others. Certainly every Senator has the right of maximum intervention, and this right must not be denied. It would be a revealing exercise, however, and I make this suggestion in all seriousness, if for a few meetings we record the frequency of intervention by each senator and the length of that intervention. I believe a few senators are unrealistic in the extent of their intervention in Senate debate, and they themselves might well rethink their role and control their participation if this became apparent.

In the four years I have spent in Senate this has certainly been the longest use of its time I have made, and for that I apologize. I do not apologize for the direct personal references to either the chairman or individual senate members. By their hundreds and thousands, deliberative groups about our size make effective decisions. We don't.

It thus becomes obvious that it is something within Senate and not outside this body which is at the root of our problem. I hope my observations may be helpful in finding a solution, and I thank my fellow members for their patience in hearing me out.

Respectfully,



William Hamilton

Copy: Dr. K. Strand