

THE SQUARE ©

Issue 1 – Winter 2022

Dennis Clark, PPP
NECW Parliamentarian

At the October 2022 meeting of the NECW Board of Directors the parliamentarian introduced the first of a series of presentations entitled “Taking the ME out of Meetings.” His contention being that the decline of civility across our land as well as across the globe has, more than ever, impacted behavior of members at meetings of various groups to which they belong. After practicing and teaching the science of parliamentary law for half a century I have seen an alarming rise in the number of individuals and factions seeking to assert their oft narrow opinions on the remainder of the members of a society in a manner inconducive to the well-being, harmony, perhaps even the existence of that association.

It is my contention that this behavior is reflective of society as a whole. The day the presentation was made to the Board in Manchester, New Hampshire news came of an attempt on the life of the husband of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Paul Pelosi at the couple’s home in California. That same night there was a murder on the main street of Manchester, something we are told is a rarity in this area. As we finish this article news comes from the University of Virginia of the shooting deaths of three students on campus with two more wounded by a fellow student. Then two more deaths reported at a college campus in Idaho. Imagine if you can, the terror that must be in the back of every parent’s mind whether their child attending the local elementary school or at university in another state will ever see their child alive again.

It ought not have to be said that these kinds of indecencies do not square with the commonly accepted precepts that a civilized society has long considered to be the norm. General Henry M. Robert (1837-1923) author of *Robert’s Rules of Order* (1876) said that “Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of real liberty.” While individuals may not have a whole lot of control about what goes on out in the streets they do have the ability to control poor behavior that may occur in meetings at which they attend. That is presuming those meetings are of an organized society which has adopted a set of bylaws which should include an article naming a parliamentary authority such as the most recent edition of *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised* or *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*. Fortunately, parliamentary law provides remedies for dealing with folks who do not know how to behave in public meetings or choose not to do so. Future articles in this column will

address how this is correctly done as well as suggestions on how to prevent problems prior to a meeting.

Perhaps the highest tenet of a democracy is the principle of rule by the majority. At the same time the rights of the minority of the members on a given side of a question must be protected, that is the right to debate the issue in order to sway other members that their view is the better one. If unable to do so they have the right to seek to modify the question (motion) if they can garner a majority vote to so amend. Hence, debate on any debatable motion or the right to attempt to amend a motion being considered by the assembly may only be closed by a two-thirds vote of those voting. Incidentally, it is important to understand what the term "majority" means in parliamentary law. Majority means more than half of those *who are present and who actually vote*. In other words, those who abstain are not counted in any vote and the chair should, except for a very few exceptions, never call for abstentions.

After nearly half a century of practice and reflection this parliamentarian has come to understand that knowledge of parliamentary processes ought not be confined to a small number of professionals. Rather, it is the duty and the responsibility of all members of a democratic, pluralistic society to be informed of at least the basic tenets of the science of parliamentary law. This being necessary not only for the protection of their own rights but for the long term interests of societies to which they have chosen to become members of.

It is a science based on certain fundamentals which are already part of the knowledge base, the moral code and culture of most. Further, they are based on logic and common sense. Among those fundamentals are courtesy toward all others, fairness and equal treatment of all, honesty and transparency in our dealings with others, as well as majority rule while protecting the rights of others as noted above. In short, it amounts simply to following a simple rule which the most of us came to recognize early on in life without even having it be taught. We would come to know it as the Golden Rule. It is this parliamentarian's view that either you get it or you don't, *to do unto others as you would have them do unto you*.

The Square

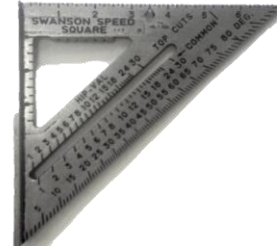
by Dennis Clark, PPP
National ECW Parliamentarian

*So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*

Isaiah 55:11

Let all things be done decently and in order.

1 Corinthians 14:40



In the Spring 2023 issue of this publication, we spoke to the rising tide of incivility sweeping our nation, exemplified by acts of physical violence perpetrated against our fellows. Sadly, this shows no signs of abating as we head into the hot summer months.

We recognize that ‘violence’ may take many forms. Mr. Webster tells us it may mean the use of physical force which causes injury, abuse, damage or destruction. It might also denote injury by distortion, infringement, or profanation. It can also mean a vehement feeling or expression.

The word “profanation” is one which is rarely heard or used, although we see its effects more and more with each passing day. It can be stated also as blasphemy, defilement, desecration, impiety, irreverence, or sacrilege.

This article will speak to this form of violence, more specifically as it relates to meetings which we attend. It goes without saying that with the increasing use of social media as a means of communication, that it becomes much easier to say things to others using words or innuendo than we might otherwise not say face to face. However, as we allow ourselves to depart from dignity and love for others as we type, I wonder if this then cheapens the dialogue we use directly with one another when we speak?

Having served as a practicing parliamentarian for half a century I have seen and heard it all when it comes to interactions of members at meetings of all kinds. We have served as parliamentarian for groups as diverse as the NRA and the National PTA;

homeowner's associations, various dog breed associations, church groups of all denominations, boards of directors of various business entities and the like.

For the most part, they all share one thing in common, however. That is, each member has made a conscious decision to join the group. Their motives for doing so may differ, their anticipation of what they hope to gain or what they wish to offer are their own. Yet, each of us have attended meetings at which members, by their words or actions, would make a neutral, outside observer believe they were the bitterest of enemies, with nothing at all in common with one another.

The parliamentary authority which the National Association of Episcopal Women, as well as most other associations of members have adopted, is the latest issue of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*. We are now on the 11th edition of that work.

This manual speaks to the proper behavior to be followed during debate on issues which come before assemblies when they hold their business meetings. These issues come in the form of motions. When a debatable motion is before the house one of the most important principles for members to know and thus to practice is this; *members must not question the motives of other members during debate on in any issue.*

In other words, we must set aside individual concerns, and think about the best interests of the entire group. We must assume that other members, who share the same interests as our own, having voluntarily and purposefully joined the association of like-minded individuals; that the each of us are acting in its best interest. Perhaps others have a different take on what actions should be taken or how they might be accomplished, however, they should NEVER discuss WHY they ought be done. If this rule is adhered to faithfully by each member and enforced uniformly and consistently by the chair, much of the rancor that we all to often experience can be alleviated. Members must demand the rule be followed if the chair does not, for whatever reasons, require it.

Right and proper behavior in meetings should be the norm and not the exception. If members exercise prudence and are circumspect in the words they speak in open forums, a society will be much more likely to achieve the objectives which members have sworn allegiance to upon their commitment to membership of the associations to

which they belong. If God's work and God's words are truly squared with our own, then, and only then, will all things be done decently and in order.



THE SQUARE

Issue 3 – Winter 2023

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This series of articles under the by-line, "The Square," is dedicated to the proposition that just as that tool was used by the ancient masons to construct edifices which would stand for hundreds, if not thousands of years, the same principle may be applied to other affairs of civilization. For purposes of these articles, I would propose that rules adopted by pluralist societies as small as only a handful (associations, clubs, etc.) to those of entire nations, are built upon principles of fairness to all, as well as equal rights and treatment for the whole. History teaches this must be the case if a democratic society is to stand the test of time.

Just as the Coliseum of ancient Rome, the pyramids of the Egyptian and Mayan Civilizations, and the Parthenon and temples of that first democracy, ancient Greece, rose from cornerstones made square by the builders, the U.S. Constitution stands as the oldest written constitution in the world today. This is a tribute to our founders who, nearly two and a half centuries ago, created a framework of government which has served as a bulwark against the forces of gluttony and greed, bigotry and hate, demagogues, extremists and anarchists. Those behind these forces, both at home and abroad, have sought to divide us as a nation throughout our history. I think it never hurts to remind that the acronym for the United States is US, We the People.

Perhaps the overriding principle of a democracy is the precept of rule by a majority of the people, or for societies (associations), their members. This truth is rightly tempered by the certain protection of those who find themselves in the minority. Under the Constitution those rights are stated in its first ten amendments, known as the Bill of Rights.

Throughout our history the Constitution, standing on the leveled principles of fairness, justice and liberty for all, has stood firm through economic upheavals, foreign wars, demands for broadened civil rights for those in the minority, even civil war.

However, there exists a thin line between the right of the majority to govern, without treading on the rights of the minority. This line does not extend to the infinite degree. That is, the wants, the desires, perhaps even the needs of every member may not be fully addressed to their liking. To do so would lead to anarchy. It would lead to society's inability to progress, to govern itself, to melt-down into what many call, a *tyranny of the minority*.

General Henry M. Robert was acutely aware of this conundrum when he wrote in one of his three books on parliamentary procedure:

"The great lesson for democracies to learn is for the majority to give to the minority a full, free opportunity to present their side of the case, and then for the minority, having failed to win a majority to their views, gracefully to submit and to recognize the action as that of the entire organization, and cheerfully to assist in carrying it out until they can secure its repeal."

Parliamentary Law

Gen. Henry M. Robert

From the time of Thomas Jefferson, this nation's first parliamentarian, having authored *Jefferson's Manual*, the first manual of procedure for the United States Senate, until today, each and every author of parliamentary manuals has embedded in their rules methods to prevent a minority of the members (especially fewer than one third) from being able to bring the business of an assembly to a grinding halt simply because they can't have their way. Many non-governmental societies, such as the NECW, use the latest version of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (12th Edition) as their parliamentary authority. In a later issue of this column, we will explore the methods therein designed to protect the rights of the majority from those who seek to hijack a societies ability to work harmoniously to achieve its objectives.

Meanwhile, in the halls of government from both sides of the aisle comes a new generation of faux parliamentarians who believe their way is the only way. Whether it is their philosophy of government, economics, or perhaps even religion, they insist on imposing their oft narrow will on the remainder of the society. As I type, a tiny minority of the U.S. House of Representatives has managed to bring the proceedings of that house, and thus much of the machinery of our nation's government, to a standstill. In the U.S. Senate the current rules allow for a minority of as few as one member to thwart the will of the majority. This is NOT patriotism; it IS tyranny, the very ideal for which they profess to condemn. Theirs is a philosophy that is wrong and wrong-headed and one which is destined, if not thwarted, to bring our democratic form of government to its very knees as the chasm between the political parties grows ever wider.

With so much turmoil rampant in the world today, this is not the time to have anarchy run amok in our halls of government. In fact, it is never time to allow for such. That way of thinking is not what this nation is about – it is diametrically opposite.

There are those who say we should not bring up this type of debate in “polite company” or in this case on the pages of a magazine dedicated to the teachings of Scripture. This parliamentarian believes however, this is exactly where the debate must be joined; if not here and in like media throughout our pluralistic society – then just where will it be? How can we stand idle while the very foundations of our democratic way of life are under assault?



THE SQUARE

Issue __ – Spring 2024

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Previous issues of this column have focused on the importance of a working knowledge of basic parliamentary rules necessary to combat the ever-growing decline of civility in personal inter-relations. Our interest especially is in how this pertains to the business meetings of various groups to which folks belong. We have noted the basic foundations upon which the science of parliamentary law is based. Without knowledge of these principles and implementing them in our interactions with others, we cannot expect to attend meetings at which members are sure to be treated fairly and with respect; the business of the assembly is conducted efficiently and in proper order; the majority of those in attendance having the final say; while at the same time ensuring those in the minority can leave the hall feeling they have at least had a fair shake. Lofty goals these, but necessary for the long-term survival of any society.

Sadly, experience has taught that no matter how conscientiously leaders and members adhere to these fundamentals, there are those who find it necessary to push the envelope in an effort to have their own self-interests placed ahead of the majority of

the members. We might refer to these individuals as bullies, or narcissists, perhaps even sociopaths. No matter what they may be named or the rationale they may have to justify their behaviors, they must be dealt with effectively so that the objects and best interests may be advanced.

The focus of this issue of *The Square* then, is to propose strategies for maintaining the aforementioned values. In this parliamentarian's view, the key to an effective, efficient, fair meeting lies in the hands of the presiding officer. Many years ago, I served as parliamentarian for a national convention which had an assembly of over two thousand delegates. There were contentious issues which arose during the business meeting. The president presided in a cool and calm manner, was cognizant of and accommodating to the concerns of all sides, clearly made decisions and dispensed information fairly and impartially and, perhaps most importantly of all, patiently. Toward the end of the final session, one of the delegates rose and asked for a point of personal privilege. She proceeded to thank the president for having guided the assembly through some very tough and important decisions with skill and aplomb. Finally, she commended her with perhaps the highest compliment I have ever heard for a presider, she thanked her for being so *gracious*. The entire assembly rose in rightful tribute to a master-class job of presiding. Gracious then, is the word I would have you take from this article. If a person who is called upon to preside does so with grace which is palpable to all, all will be well. The dictionary defines gracious as being kind, courteous, and compassionate to others. When and if you ever preside over a meeting, keep this word in the back of your mind. Also, remember to smile, even if you are being seemingly attacked and belittled, a confident, heartfelt smile can be quite disarming. It is difficult to be mean to someone who is smiling at you. These may seem to be simplistic strategies, but in my near fifty-year experience of serving as a parliamentary adviser, they have proven to be quite effective.

Then come those who cannot, or will not be swayed with a mere smile, or with any of the trappings which might normally keep an assembly of like-minded individuals who are working for the better interest of the society in line. For the good of the whole they must be redirected to a better path both for themselves and the society. While

often those who insist on inciting unconstructive controversy expect to be dealt with in a harsh and punitive manner, the best interests of the society calls for the type of gracious temperament described in the preceding paragraph. However, when combative behavior is manifested, the chair must greet it with firmness and an unyielding commitment to maintaining order by fairly enforcing the rules, and project an unwavering dedication to advancing the societies purpose and objectives as noted in the bylaws.

An individual who finds themselves in the position of being called to chair a meeting who recognizes they do not have the will, the skill, or the temerity to meet these challenges is right to consider asking someone more suited to the task to preside over portions of the business meeting. Especially those parts which are expected to be contentious or which require a certain amount of parliamentary skill to bring about a successful outcome. Examples would be proposed bylaws amendments, controversial resolutions, or elections which are processed on the convention floor. The president might ask a vice president, a former president or any other officer or member who is known to possess that skill set and who is also judged by most to be fair and impartial. Certainly, a professional parliamentarian is trained to serve in just those capacities.

Should the chairman determine to follow this course at any point during the business meeting, they would ask the assemblies permission to allow the individual chosen to preside. If there is no objection that individual would assume the chair until that part of the meeting has concluded. It is important to adhere to any bylaws provision which might require a different course, however, if no one objects to the change it would be in order. If there is an objection the process would need to be voted on with a majority vote sustaining the action. Again, the bylaws must be adhered to if provisions therein provide otherwise.

The procedure noted in the preceding paragraph is referred to in parliamentary science as general or unanimous consent. It is possible to sail through a great deal of business of an assembly that is known to be uncontroversial, by the chair simply stating, "without objection" then state the proposal being considered. Should no one object the matter is adopted and the secretary records the action as having been adopted

without objection. Should a single member object, the motion must be put through the regular parliamentary processes.

The next issue of *The Square* will note additional methods to maintain order, and insure effective, efficient and productive meetings. Meanwhile, should members have questions about this article or any others regarding parliamentary law they are welcome to ask them through the auspices of their district representative or any officer. I will be happy to answer them, perhaps publish them in a future issue anonymously of course.