

# Parliamentary Consultants, Inc.

DORIS P. ZIMMERMAN  
PROFESSIONAL REGISTERED PARLIAMENTARIAN  
1202 Berwick Road  
Ruxton, MD 21204  
(301) 825-3814

July 20, 1986

*Dynamite*

TO: Dr. Patricia Aloat  
FROM: Doris P. Zimmerman, P.R.P. *D.Z.*

The Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in S.E. Asia began on a confusing and unfortunate note and rapidly deteriorated. As a parliamentarian, I have never witnessed such a dramatic example of the importance of operating within the framework of established parliamentary law, which enables people of widely divergent views to make decisions with the least amount of friction and divisiveness while protecting the rights of all.

The following are some observations and comments regarding the deplorable lack of the basic parliamentary practice we Americans are privileged to expect in the conduct of meetings of "ordinary" societies.

1. Doors of meeting hall locked:

Sergeants at arms stood beside the locked doors of the meeting hall as members gathered for the meeting scheduled at 2:30 pm. The doors remained locked until 2:47 pm. This first action meant that over 300 people were milling about in the lobby outside the hall, becoming increasingly perplexed and restive.

2. The meeting was called to order by the Chairman of the Board and Presiding Officer at 2:58 pm who immediately vacated the Chair, which was assumed by the Executive Director, a paid employee of the organization.

- a) there were no opening ceremonies (i.e. invocation, etc)
- b) there was no report of the Credentials Committee although registration had taken place and badges were required for admission to the hall. A quorum was not declared as present and the meeting in official session.
- c) special rules of order were not presented or adopted. Apparently, the Board of Directors had adopted various restrictive rules limiting debate, voting etc. which were not presented to the assembly for either their information or approval and/or amendment. This observer is still unclear regarding the rules under which the meeting was held.

3. As the first order of business, the Executive Director read a statement which violated every rule of decorum in debate that Robert lists. (RONR pp. 331-334) During the statement, five people were named, three from the retiring Board and two from the incoming Board as being disruptive, having motives of undermining the organization and "taking over" the meeting.

Members began calling out comments and questions from their seats without recognition. The Executive Director proceeded to shout over this din and



confusion, digressing from the prepared remarks to debate and also make further public allegations that members of the staff had been physically abused and threatened.

4. Shortly thereafter, the Executive Director announced that the meeting was to be closed to all except the League members wearing blue badges. (There were two other classes of attendees, those with buff colored badges and those with white badges.)
  - a) A point of order was raised that the assembly had not adopted the exclusive rule and that such a rule was in contradiction to traditional practices of the group.
  - b) Ignoring the point, the Executive Director directed the Sergeants at Arms to remove all those not displaying blue badges.
  - c) Another point of order was raised and the speaker was advised that "It was the prerogative of the Chairman" to exclude people from the meeting.
  - d) The issue of closing the meeting was finally put to a vote (by the Executive Director, not the Chairman) Debate of the motion was not allowed, a member being ruled out of order who attempted to speak on behalf of an "open" meeting. The question of closing the meeting was lost and the meeting remained open.
5. The next order of business was the Resolutions to be put before the assembly. The Chairman of the Board again vacated the Chair and the Chairman of the Resolutions Committee put all questions on the resolutions, any amendments and decided all points of order.

The entire proceeding was unruly and order was never properly established. Members spoke in debate to motions/problems not on the floor. Motions such as "Lay on the Table" were ruled out of order. Full debate was not allowed on questions. When the word "question!" was called out, a second was sought and then the question was put to a vote. (Surely, it is common knowledge that a vote must be taken and 2/3 of the members present must vote in the affirmative to cut off debate.)

6. At about 6:15 pm, a group of members left the meeting hall. A member present requested that the chair establish the presence of a quorum. The resolutions chairman, still occupying the chair, although there had been requests that the Chairman of the Board preside, declared a quorum present using the previous counted vote. During this fiasco, the resolutions chairman also instructed the Sergeants at Arms that the "Minority" would not be allowed to leave the hall and further instructed the Tellers to count them as they left!

7. A counted vote on Resolution 9 indicated the absence of a quorum. The Chairman of the Board finally assumed the chair and the meeting was adjourned at 6:30 pm.

It was with great sadness that I observed an organization with such admirable objectives fall prey to such disunity and disharmony, much of which could have been alleviated by the proper parliamentary instruction of the presiding officer and the adherence to accepted parliamentary rules.

*Denis P. Zimmerman, PRP*