

A VETERAN DIRECTOR OF FORENSICS LOOKS AT THE FUTURE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

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Perhaps, I should title this paper "The Future of Parliamentary Debate in the West." I have not been particularly familiar with parliamentary debate as it's practiced on the east coast, although I know parliamentary debate has been active in that area for quite some time. Even though some western schools such as the Air Force Academy, Claremont College, and Central Missouri State University attended a few of these eastern tournaments and maintained memberships in the American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA), in my mind, parliamentary debate in the Western United States simply did not exist prior to the fall of 1991.

During the school year 1990-1991, I began talking with Major Gwendolyn Fayne, who was then the Director of Forensics at the United States Air Force Academy. I knew little about parliamentary debate, but Gwen supplied me with information and asked me to help her bring the activity to the Rocky Mountain region. After reading the information, I thought back many years to a somewhat similar meeting, in which the participants hoped to accomplish the same goals I want to accomplish with parliamentary debate.

Almost twenty-five years ago, seven directors of forensics—Tim **Browning**, University of Arizona; **Penny Byrne**, University of Texas at El Paso; **Jack Howe**, California State University at Long Beach; **Rick Sorvig**, Arizona State University; **Paul Winters**, University of Pacific;

Gordon Zimmerman, University of Nevada at Reno; and I met to discuss a new form of debate.

Contrary to what some may believe, our intent was not to replace the existing form of debate, now called NDT, but rather to add a dimension we believed would strengthen debate. We were concerned that inexperienced students, particularly students we might recruit from our basic classes, found it extremely difficult to enter the activity, and many who tried to enter were quickly discouraged and dropped out of the program.

Several institutional practices at that time hindered inexperienced students from debating. Although most tournaments offered a Junior Division, few ever offered a Novice Division. The topic was announced on the 1st of July, and by the beginning of September even Junior Division debaters were well prepared and well briefed--many with the assistance of their senior colleagues. Programs in the Rocky Mountain Region and in the Southwest tended to be relatively small. Directors did little recruiting and often had only a few returning experienced debaters. We relied heavily on recruiting students after they arrived on campus or from our classes. Some of these students had high school debating experience, but many did not.

We seven founders saw the Southwest Cross-Examination Debate Association (now CEDA) as a way to bring these students into the

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activity. To accommodate the inexperienced student and schools on the quarter system, we didn't announce the topic until mid-October, and we had a new topic for the second semester. All of us continued to be active in traditional NDT debate—at least during the first few years.

Although CEDA struggled to exist, it did achieve the goals we set forth. Inexperienced students entered the activity and gained experience. For most of us, these students then entered NDT debate, and many were reasonably successful. After the first five years, CEDA began to grow "by leaps and bounds," and the activity changed.

I'm not sure just why CEDA changed from its original intent and become a competitor, and in many cases, a replacement for NDT. Perhaps it was the point system, which gave many directors something to show to their administrators, even when they failed to win tournaments. Possibly it was dissatisfaction with NDT or some other reason. Finally though, the lack of tournaments and competition in our area forced me and most of the last remaining NDT holdouts to switch exclusively to CEDA.

I won't comment or even attempt to evaluate whether the change in CEDA has been for the good or for the bad, but clearly, it is not serving its original intent as well as it did in the early years. Many tournaments do have Novice Divisions, but even for these students a little experience helps, and having experienced senior students doing research and helping coach is important.

But let's get back to our discussion of parliamentary debate. After talking with Major Fayne, I saw the possibility of parliamentary debate opening the door to two groups of students: first, the same inexperienced students that CEDA originally appealed to and second, those students who normally only do individual events. Although individual events students are usually excellent speakers, most have not debated either in high school or in college. Most of the forensics programs in the west offered both debate and

individual events, but some schools offered only an individual events program.

Major Fayne had offered parliamentary debate at the Air Force tournament in the fall of 1991. I was surprised and pleased when they drew about 18 teams. A couple of other tournaments during 1991-1992 offered the event, and while the entries were not large, the number of teams made it possible to run the division. The Western Parliamentary Debate Association was organized in 1991-1992. In October 1992, I offered parliamentary at the Colorado College tournament and attracted 32 teams. Several other tournaments in the west were equally successful. In 1993-1994, almost every tournament in District IX offered parliamentary, and our own tournament attracted 50 teams. Later, Greg Young from Lewis and Clark and I talked with a group of faculty and students at the University of Puget Sound. Several tournament directors agreed to offer the event, and both directors and students committed to entering.

During the summer of 1993 the Western Parliamentary Debate Association became the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), consisting primarily, but not exclusively of western schools. We elected officers and scheduled a National Tournament, held in late March of 1994. Clearly, NPDA is a success west of the Mississippi and shows signs of continued growth.

What do I foresee for the future for NPDA? Well, I am certainly concerned it may take the same path as CEDA, which is taking the same path which NDT took several years ago—although I expect to be long gone from forensics before that happens. At the present, I see several factors which may prevent NPDA from becoming an alternative, and to continue to be a supplement to traditional debate. Most tournaments allow undergraduates to judge rounds, and tournaments are encouraged to have at least one-third of the judging pool comprised of "lay" judges. The topic is announced ten to fifteen minutes prior to the start of the round, and a different topic is used for each preliminary and each elimination round.

Students are not permitted to take evidence cards to the podium, although they may take a "legal pad" with notes they have made since the topic was announced or from the remarks of the previous speaker. Humor is encouraged, although the debate is expected to be of a serious nature. Heckling and interrupting the speaker (within reason) is encouraged.

Currently, I see the future of Parliamentary Debate as providing an avenue for inexperienced students and students who normally do only individual events. Except for the I.E. students, I would not expect my students to do parliamentary on a regular basis for more than one year. My expectation is that most of the students involved in forensics at other universities would also participate in CEDA or NDT debate (depending on the nature of the program) during their second year of competition. I do not consider parliamentary debate to be intellectually challenging enough to keep students interested for more than a few tournaments. Students will learn the general format of debate, will learn to speak better, will become more comfortable in a competitive atmosphere, and in some cases enjoy the good feeling of success. But, the debate is limited to the knowledge the students possess upon entering the round, and it doesn't enable them to learn through the process of researching a topic over a longer period. So, even if NPDA doesn't change at all, I see it becoming very popular and very successful and offering an opportunity for many students, at least during the short run.

But, I am convinced that NPDA will change. Already, I have heard suggestions we ought to send the topic out two weeks prior to the tournament and that we should use the same topic for all rounds. If this happens, can announcing the topic early in September and using the same topic all semester be far behind?

At a 1993 NPDA meeting, motions were offered to eliminate undergraduate judges at tournaments and to consider not using lay judges at the national tournament. Although I objected, we did agree not to use undergraduate judges at

the national tournament. I am convinced that changing the time the topic is announced, using the same topic for an entire tournament, or for an entire semester, and moving towards the use of greater numbers of "professional judges" will move Parliamentary Debate in the same direction CEDA moved. Whether this will be good or bad is for each individual to determine, but certainly it will change the nature of the activity and eliminate many of the goals I anticipated.

Although some changes might be good for the activity, my concern is that these changes lead to other changes, and the primary goal of the activity is lost. I wouldn't object to giving students a day or two to read up on the topic and then use the same topic for one tournament (but only for one). I believe this would increase the educational value of the activity. But, does that lead to one topic for a longer period?

Professional judges should be best for the activity. My school, and I suspect most others, support forensics because they believe it enhances our students' educational experience. As a teacher, I believe I can write better ballots and give better critiques than someone who is not familiar with debate. Graduate students, many of whom hope to become teachers and Directors of Forensics, should also be better able to educate students.

However, my concern is that we, as professionals, lack the courage to penalize students who fail to communicate or speak only in jargon that people outside of the activity cannot understand. We accept poor communication because "others accept," and we don't want to stand alone. Also, the activity seems to attract a group of semi-professionals who have no academic interest other than forensics. We gravitate towards a small group who hear most rounds at major tournaments. I am certain it concerns most of us to have to admit we would not want our Dean or President to hear a round of CEDA or NDT, but I was pleased to have our Dean hear a round of NPDA.

Forensics is not an end in itself, although some

view it that way, but rather it should be a part of an overall academic program. If we clearly define our goals and have the courage to stay with them, then changes should enhance, rather than diminish, parliamentary debate. Do we have that courage? I don't know. Ask me five years from now.