

Untangling The Web - The Senate Controversy

Just a couple of thoughts on the tangled web which was woven by two successive Senate meetings of controversy over the seating of Doug Smith. I admit this will be a hodge-podge without any particular connection but I hope that the following collage will provide some sort of an insight into the workings of power structures around UPEI.

Between these two meetings one spent, according to him, about seventy-two hours attempting

to work out a compromise between Presidents Baker and Campbell. As finally drafted, it consisted of the placing of Doug Smith on Senate with the proviso that Marilyn MacPherson resign first. As we all know Doug was seated without this proviso.

Without dealing directly with the merits or demerit of this compromise, I would like to question the conduct of Baker and Campbell. I would think that Gordon Campbell has no moral right to back

out on an agreement he has entered into, whether verbally or not, whether good or bad. Either he should have never entered into it in the first place or he should have stuck to it. As to Baker, he appears to be in at least as bad a light. Does he have the right to threaten to walk out on Senate on an issue which amounts to little more than petty politics, thus holding up the proceedings of that body for possibly the rest of the term? And if it is more

than politics why did he back down on his original threat? Maybe he's just a paper tiger. I believe this to be truth but if it is not then I invite either Baker or Campbell to dispute the facts as I have presented them.

Why did Gordon Campbell's challenge to the chair not come up for discussion at the second meeting? If a motion as serious as this one is made then it should either be voted upon or withdrawn. At present Senate is in the interesting position of having the authority of its chairman challenged for what appears to be an indeterminate length of time. Will we vote on this motion three years from now when the facts of the case are forgotten or will the question hang over Senate permanently. Another motion, proposed by Wade McLaughlan, was also made at that meeting. It too has been forgotten. The best solution to this whole mess would be for Senate to vote that any motions moved or passed at that abortive meeting be considered null and void. If we do not settle this once and for all then we are in effect allowing the rules of Senate to consider its rules of order little more than conveniences. A dangerous precedent, to say the least.

Just a couple more points. More than a dozen people have told me that President Baker normally acts arbitrarily, intimidatingly, and interferingly with Senate. However he did not at the second of these two meetings. Is it a coincidence that seventy students and a healthy majority of Senators were breathing down his neck at the time?

Another point. Why was Doug not introduced to Senate by Chairman Baker in the normal manner even though a suggestion to that effect was made at the time?

And finally, why does Baker, as Chairman have the right to vote either with the rest of Senators or as tie-breaker? As far as I know this is the only place where this practice is carried on. Further, according to one source of mine this right was introduced at the Feb. 19 meeting of Senate without any discussion of this change in Senate procedure. And I think you can guess who introduced this practice.

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