

**Easy Keesey: The new edition of Ray Keesey's Modern  
Parliamentary Procedure,  
A celebration of anniversaries and renewal  
The Robert W. English Lecture, August 3, 2018  
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Thank you to President Kay Crews for her kind invitation to share my thoughts with you this evening; and thank you to the Board and leadership of AIP, current and past, for your service to AIP, to parliamentary procedure, and to the advancement of deliberative democracy. And kudos to my fellow Keesey revision authors, who made this important update a reality. A tribute is owed to Allison Wallis and the New Orleans host committee, who enabled us to celebrate Keesey in the Big Easy. And my deeply heartfelt gratitude to my wonderful wife, Dr. Catherine Milch Malamut, who has encouraged and supported my involvement in parliamentary procedure and nonprofit governance and graciously covered for missed family time while I served clients and attended conferences.

As most of you know, this year marks a very important anniversary in the world of meeting procedure: Sixty years ago, in 1958, Cyril Northcote Parkinson published a key insight into meeting procedure, Parkinson's Law of Triviality in Meetings: "The time spent on any item in the agenda will be in inverse proportion to the sum involved."<sup>1</sup> We have all seen that, haven't we? Not the impression of the deliberative process that we want people to leave the meeting with. But it is a common impression of meetings that we often need to address, from people who assume bad meetings are caused by the current rules or even the fact that there are rules, rather than realizing that even the best rules can't completely overcome human nature.

Oh, you mean that wasn't the parliamentary anniversary you were

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law or the Pursuit of Progress* (1958). This book was intended to be a popular and somewhat humorous tome. He had previously published *Parkinson's Law, and Other Studies in Management* (1957), which is more of a technical work on the science of business management.

thinking of? I did hear that there was another anniversary this year. That's right. It is sixty years since AIP was founded. The famous "first" meeting of AIP on the Clark Street bus in Chicago when Bob English and Frank Bronwell laid out the founding philosophy of AIP. In that momentous year for AIP, the Advisory Board was founded, the organization was incorporated, the first CPPs recognized, and the Action Program was adopted. As recounted by past AIP President Charlie Johnson, from that first meeting on the bus, AIP was intended to uphold a more modern approach to parliamentary procedure, encompassing teaching the philosophy rather than just the rules, and including the views of different parliamentary authorities.<sup>2</sup> The first edition of the *Parliamentary Journal* clearly announced this goal: "We expect AIP to be progressive in helping to develop improvements in both Parliamentary Procedure and Parliamentary Law. ... [M]ore teaching of present orthodox parliamentary procedure is not enough. We must develop a better understanding of sound democratic principles and more *faith* in the democratic way of life."<sup>3</sup>

Bob English, founder of AIP, was man of vision, prescient, an independent thinker ahead of his time, with boundless enthusiasm, a natural educator who taught and served as a high school principal for many years. He had a vision that a fairer and better meeting process, clearer and more understandable to the participants, would result in fairer and better outcomes, ones that were both objectively better (because they reflected more inputs, more efficiently processed) and more likely to be successfully implemented because the participants would be more vested in the outcomes.

The key focus of the AIP, since its foundation, has been the Action Program, adopted even before the first bylaws. And the original introduction defiantly states, "The purpose of the American Institute of Parliamentarians is to improve parliamentary procedure." Not simply to teach parliamentary procedure, or spread

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Johnson, *Do you remember?* 49(4) PJ 149 (Oct. 2008).

<sup>3</sup> *Introducing the American Institute of Parliamentarians*, 1(1) PJ 3 (March 1960).

the gospel, but to *improve*. It further went on to “encourage[e] the use of simple parliamentary language, thus avoiding unnecessary complications and confusing expressions.”<sup>4</sup> Those sentiments remain in the Action Program to this day.

Bob English found an ally in Ray Keesey, also an educator, the latter at the university level. Keesey brought a communications professor’s scientific knowledge of human behavior to the table in his approach to parliamentary procedure. It’s also an almost anniversary for Ray Keesey. Next year will be the 60th anniversary of Keesey’s first article on parliamentary procedure, first published in the Delaware School Journal and then republished in the PJ when Keesey became active with AIP.<sup>5</sup> Even in 1959, Keesey was somewhat of an iconoclast, arguing that presidents of membership organizations are not elected for their expertise in meeting procedures and should therefore be replaced as meeting chairs by trained parliamentarians, either by a volunteer member speaker of a house of delegates or by an outside professional presider, which was a really novel idea at the time.

So Keesey was a natural fit for AIP and Bob English’s modernizing approach to parliamentary procedure. He was soon appointed to the Advisory Board. Trained in analytical thought as an academician, he studied meeting procedures when that was a regular part of the typical Communications faculty’s purview. His academic study familiarized him with the history of parliamentary procedure in the United States and Great Britain. He was therefore a parliamentarian’s parliamentarian, serving as parliamentarian for his state’s teachers union. Nevertheless, he was confounded when, as Associate Dean of the University of Delaware College of Arts & Sciences, he found himself tasked with running meetings of a rebellious and somewhat uncooperative faculty in the middle of the social upheavals of late 1960s, when respect for authority and differing opinions was waning, much as it is today. This experience

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<sup>4</sup> *Status of Our Action Program*, 1(2) PJ 17 (July 1960).

<sup>5</sup> Ray E. Keesey, *Don’t Ask the Parliamentarian*, 24(3) PJ 105 (July 1983).

prompted some of Keesey's most thoughtful and original work as a parliamentary scholar, in the area of the "chairman by decree," a presiding officer appointed by an outside authority who lacks the democratic legitimacy of an elected meeting chair.<sup>6</sup>

Keesey was concerned about alienation from meeting attendance due in part to antiquated procedures, resulting in unrepresentative meetings reaching decisions that, while legally valid, were not supported by the membership. He said, "I believe in the principles of parliamentary procedure as being the best way ... devised to assist a group at arriving at a deliberative decision. As parliamentarians, our job is to try to keep this image going, to help all we can, to recognize the limitations of it, but to be ready to indicate that there is a procedure which can be followed that will meet most any circumstance."<sup>7</sup> After presiding over contentious meetings in a rapidly changing world, Keesey wrote *Modern Parliamentary Procedure* in 1974, in part to promote a fair process for group decision making that preserved the key elements of established and familiar practice with modern wording, simplified process, and an emphasis on fairness, to try to ensure that participants respected the decision making process and would therefore accede to the moral validity of decisions made. He wanted to overcome not only the objection that parliamentary procedure was antiquated, but also the nuanced complexity of Robert's. Robert's includes minority protections that often backfire because they result in a rule/exception framework carried to a mind-numbing level of detail that only experts could master, thereby outweighing the rationale for those subtle protections. Keesey, on the other hand, took pride in following Bob English's recommendations on consolidating and streamlining the number of motions. He cited to English's article, *Motions which should be abolished*, prominently in the text of *Modern Parliamentary*

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<sup>6</sup> Ray E. Keesey, *Chairman by Decree*, 10 (3) PJ 3 (July 1969).

<sup>7</sup> Henry M. Robert, III, William J. Evans, Ray E. Keesey, *The Rules: Can They Cope?* 12(1) JP 3 (1971).

## *Procedure.*<sup>8</sup>

Our President Kay Crews mentioned earlier that Bob English wrote a foreword to Ray Keesey's 1974 first edition of *Modern Parliamentary Procedure*. What she didn't mention is that the foreword was published posthumously and it was one of the last writings of AIP's founder on parliamentary procedure, in effect his parliamentary testament. In fact, Marshall Soren, whom some of you may remember, said of *Modern Parliamentary Procedure*, that “[n]o finer tribute to the memory of Robert W. English ... can be conceived, than the appearance of this first revolutionary guide.”<sup>9</sup> This description, from someone who eviscerated the 1970 revision of Robert's Rules of Order, is a true commendation. Soren had previously decried the corpulent 1970 Newly Revised version of the Robert's once slim tome.

Bob English said in his foreword to Keesey's work, “For decades there has been a serious need for a modern book of parliamentary procedure, one that would serve as a suitable, up-to-date parliamentary authority ... , a book acceptable to the vast number who dislike the misleading terminology and ill-advised complications of parliamentary orthodoxy. Dr. Keesey's book fulfills this need and improves parliamentary procedure so that it is easier for vital, controversial issues to be solved by parliamentary means rather than by violence or dictatorial action.”<sup>10</sup> The key elements of this forceful statement are included in the purposes of AIP, as stated to this day on the organization's webpage.

As we have heard, by 1994, the 1974 version of Keesey was no longer in print. The story of how the American Psychological Association acquired the rights to Keesey's book and reprinted it is told in the introduction to the 1994 edition, and was described by Joe Theobald yesterday. The 1994 version debuted shortly before

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<sup>8</sup> Robert W. English, *Motions which Should be Abolished*, 5(3) PJ 28 (July 1964), cited in Keesey (1994), p. 72, n. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall Soren, *Model Parliamentary Procedure*, 15(3) PJ 26 (July 1974).

<sup>10</sup> Ray E. Keesey, *Modern Parliamentary Procedure* (1st ed. 1974), p. xi.

Professor Keesey's death the following year. But the revised edition's only significant change was to update to gender neutral pronouns; there were no significant substantive changes. By 2016, it was apparent that Keesey's *Modern Parliamentary Procedure* was no longer quite so *modern*.

Nevertheless, it remained clear that an approach to parliamentary procedure like Keesey's is as necessary and relevant today as it was 60 years ago when AIP was founded and when Ray Keesey first started writing about parliamentary procedure. Just last month, the *Economist* magazine, which debuted Parkinson's first cynical behavioral law in 1955,<sup>11</sup> ran a column subtitled *How to make meetings work better*, citing Parkinson's rule of triviality in meetings.<sup>12</sup> The article suggested solutions that would already be well known to any parliamentarian; of course, without any reference to a parliamentary authority. The need is still out there for a comprehensive treatment of meeting procedures that is fresh, vibrant, and accessible to the ordinary reader. In the electronic era, the need for a parliamentary authority that can be mastered in an afternoon seems even greater. We appear to be entering a new era of incivility where we need to find, more than ever, ways for groups of diverse people to come together and make decisions respected by all participants.

Unfortunately, by 2016, Keesey's style was notably 1970s. In some aspects, its prescribed procedures showed their age more than the *AIP Standard Code*, which had continued to evolve through the years. Nevertheless, in the parliamentary realm, it remained the most radical simplification of the parliamentary process that still was sufficiently robust to provide all the tools needed to run a sophisticated membership meeting. Updating the text was the optimal way to bring Bob English's vision of simplified and modernized parliamentary procedure into the twenty-first century. Unlike the 1994 edition, this was to be a thorough revision,

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<sup>11</sup> Parkinson's Law, *Economist*, Nov. 19, 1955.

<sup>12</sup> Bartleby, *Taking Minutes, wasting hours*, *Economist*, June 30, 2018.

including some re-organization.

Joe Theobald ably explained yesterday how AIP developed its relationship with APA and the technical aspects of how the second edition of Keesey's book was drafted. My discussion addresses a more philosophical approach to the new edition. We tried to keep Keesey's voice and basic text wherever possible. We did take out a fair bit of the snark, which Keesey had used to demolish half-hearted pretenses used to justify motions that survived in orthodox authorities as archaic relics. That approach seemed dated at this point when the argument had already been won.

Instead, the authorship team for the 2018 edition concentrated on reconciling the few inconsistencies in the 1994 edition, integrating new technology, and continuing the simplification of procedure consistent with Keesey's underlying principles. Although the book is now several pages longer than the 1994 edition, it is much more readable with its larger font size. The actual text is not significantly longer than the original. We strove to ensure that Marshall Soren's 1974 description would remain accurate: "For those not skilled in the old rules, this book is so reasonable and lucid in terminology, that a few hours of study will allow them to participate intelligently in deliberative proceedings."<sup>13</sup> We addressed Soren's key criticisms of Keesey, which constituted the only contemporaneous substantive suggestions for improvement. We considerably re-worked the discussion of committee reports; we used "general consent" in the standard parliamentary manner and not to mean "the sense of the meeting"; and we provided that any question involving the chair's judgment could be appealed. We did retain filling blanks, about which we reached general consent that it remained a useful procedure.

After working closely with the text, we realized that Keesey had a significant emphasis on fairness, especially towards those members who weren't able to invest the time to study procedure in depth.

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<sup>13</sup> Marshall Soren, *Model Parliamentary Procedure*, 15(3) PJ 26 (July 1974).

This focus had not been made explicit in the text itself, but was apparent on closer study. For instance, Keesey's prohibition on ending discussion with a motion to close debate significantly predated the parallel provision in the *AIP Standard Code*. We felt that restoring the right to demand verification of a voice vote was consistent with that Keeseyan principle of fairness. What was somewhat harder was when we found places where *Keesey* was consistent with *Robert* and contrary to the *Standard Code*, which generally constituted somewhat of middle ground in modernization and simplification between *Robert* and *Keesey*. In such cases, we were confronted with the dilemma: Was the consistency with *Robert* simply ignorance of a more modern procedural approach that evolved after 1974? Or was this a place where *Keesey*'s voice and underlying principles, particularly the emphasis on fairness, were going in a different direction from the *Standard Code*'s elevation of simplification above all? We certainly didn't want *Keesey* to become a watered down version of the *Standard Code*, effectively a *Standard Code in Brief*, but rather to remain true to *Keesey*'s own unique approach to meeting procedure. As an example, in reviewing these countervailing viewpoints, we retained *Keesey*'s position (consistent with *Robert*) that rules of order contained in the bylaws should be suspendable. We felt that the ordinary members should not be forced to suffer from adverse effects of poor bylaws draftsmanship, just for the sake of a simpler rule.

I want to leave you with some thoughts about Bob English, Ray Keesey, and their legacy to AIP. How many organizations can say, on their 60th anniversary, that their underlying principles, for us our Action Program, have kept them at the cutting edge of their field for all that time? That they have never rested on their laurels? AIP has a considerable history of accomplishments to celebrate on its 60th anniversary. Today, due to fidelity to the vision of AIP's founders, the authorship team is able to add to those substantive achievements by providing this new version of *Keesey* as a gift to the organization on the occasion of its 60th anniversary celebration.