

CHANGES IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE
SYDNEY UNIVERSITY ARTS ASSOCIATION, 1953 TO 1974*

BY R. IAN JACK

IT gives me particular pleasure to be your guest speaker this evening, for this Annual General Meeting celebrates your coming of age. This is your twenty-first birthday party. Although the Association was first mooted at the Faculty of Arts on 10 December 1952, it had a normal, healthy gestation period, saw the light of day at a cocktail party on 18 August 1953 and was christened by the adoption of the constitution at the inaugural general meeting on 30 September.

From the first the Association has had, very properly, a close association with the Faculty which has tried to educate, humanize and civilize those who are eligible for Association membership. I sometimes wonder whether in fact the Association is not the only thing for which the B.A. degree categorically qualifies its holders. Despite the non-vocational nature of the B.A. and despite all the murmurings in the world at large about such an education, the Faculty still flourishes ; it has kept pace with the expansion of the University and looks after a third of the total undergraduate enrolment in the ten faculties each year. But the Faculty which founding members of this Association knew twenty-one years ago was a very different kettle of fish from the Faculty in 1974, and when your committee had the kindness to invite me to address you in my official capacity, I could conceive of no topic more appropriate than the changes which have come over the Faculty during the Association's youth, adolescence and early manhood.

Of necessity, my view must be a partial one. I joined the staff of this University only at the end of 1961 and the 1950s are therefore known to me as a matter of historical record, embellished by colleagues' reminiscences of greater or lesser accuracy. The history of the Faculty should be written, of course, with perhaps a closed period of at least fifty years to ensure candour : I have no such current ambitions—all that I shall attempt is to pick out some of the cardinal points of change as I see them from my present perch.

The first and most obvious change is, of course, the sheer size of the operation. If one looks at the membership of Faculty over these years, it is a graph which climbs increasingly steeply. Excluding the five *ex officio* members, the Faculty increased its membership during the 1950s from 68 in 1953 to 94 in 1959. This was a jerky

* An address delivered to the Association on 19 September 1974 by Associate Professor R. I. Jack, Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

progress, however. Membership was virtually stable from 1953 to 1955 and from 1956 to 1957: the big increase came between 1955 and 1957, when membership moved from 69 to 80, and after 1957 the rise has been steady and accelerating, following on the great milestone of the Murray Report. The result of this continuing expansion was a rise over the 1960s from 116 in 1960 to 227 in 1969, a virtual doubling in a decade, and an accelerated growth rate thereafter to the present 344. Now it is true that these statistics, like most statistics, are partially misleading: membership of Faculty is restricted to full-time members of staff of the rank of senior tutor and above. There is a large and indispensable underworld of tutors, teaching fellows and part-time staff which has grown, I think, at a rate faster than the full-time lecturing staff. And there is also the student body, five of whom are now full members of Faculty and who in their thousands, milling and seething like the Russian chorus in *Boris Godunov*, supply us all with our *raison d'être*. But since, as Professor Chambers will I am sure verify, I am becoming increasingly unfashionable in my views, I shall be talking about the membership of Faculty, not about the great community of staff and students.

The Faculty, then, in my sense, has quintupled in size since this Association was born, from 68 to 344. Of necessity, the personal intimacy of Faculty has been reduced. Doubtless this sort of complaint has always been heard: those who were here at the end of the war, when there were 49 members of Faculty, doubtless bemoaned the loss of the intimacy of 1938 when there were only 31 members and I don't really know how people regarded the alarming increase from Mungo MacCallum's Faculty of 12 in 1910 to Francis Anderson's of 19 in 1920 to Todd's of 28 in 1930. But the sheer weight of numbers, reaching three figures for the first time in 1960, has created a new problem of coherence, even of identification. I doubt whether even Professor O'Neil, with his unrivalled knowledge of this university's personnel, could identify every current member of his former Faculty. I certainly cannot, and I regret it.

This regret is, however, tempered by the opportunities which one gets of seeing the members of one's Faculty as a group. The most obvious forum for this is the Faculty meeting itself and if one looks at that a rather different view emerges. The long and short of it is that a very much lower percentage of members now attend Faculty meetings than when the Association was young. When the inaugural meeting of the Association was announced to Faculty on 5 August 1953, there were 23 members present as well as the Dean (Professor Farrell). This was the average attendance at the five meetings of Faculty in 1953—attendance fluctuated from 18 to 35—and constituted 35% of the total membership of 68. At the best attended meeting of that year, on 18 March 1953, just over half the membership was assembled together. I doubt whether we shall ever again see half the membership of Faculty together. In 1963, which I chose as the middle year of this survey, attendance was still reasonable; it fluctuated from 44 to 71, with an average of 50 over the seven meetings. The membership of Faculty was then 152, so the average was 38% and the largest attendance 47%.

Now in 1974, I have summoned six meetings of the Faculty up to date. The average attendance is even lower than two years before, down to 53; the highest attendance has been 73 and the lowest 30. There are now 344 members of Faculty, and these figures represent in percentages a low point of 9%, an average of 15% and an upper point of 21%. The total membership of Faculty is, of course, never in Sydney simultaneously because of sabbatical leave and other miscellaneous commitments, but this is more than counterbalanced by the fact that the attendance figures include as whole people chaps who simply pop in for a short part of the meeting. The real number present at the one time in the Senate Room or nowadays in the Professorial Board Room is very substantially lower than those statistics suggest. An exceedingly dramatic example was on 2 November 1971, the meeting at which my predecessor was elected after a contest with Associate Professor St. Leon: the attendance record for that meeting shows the largest attendance on record, 126, just short of half of the total membership. It does not show what all of us present remember vividly, that some 70 of those retired after half an hour when the result of the election was declared, and many of those 70 have not been seen since (particularly since, through some oversight, I was elected unopposed last year).

The new breed of academic man and woman seems, therefore, less likely to participate in Faculty affairs directly except when unusually stimulated by a barely academic motive. What is going to happen if and when the new by-laws changing the university government are approved by the Governor-in-Council I do not know, for they require a quorum of 60 for the Faculty of Arts and although this year the attendance record has narrowly topped 60 on three occasions, there have never been more than 50 together at any one time.

The implications of this problem lead me on to the other major aspect of change which I want to discuss briefly. When the Association was founded, Faculty really did look at most aspects of its affairs in detail, including the very wide range of applications from students in some sort of difficulty. The character of the agenda was therefore shaped by the increasing bulk of student cases. A very significant step had already been taken, however, in 1951 when a new by-law providing for the position of sub-dean was approved by Senate and Dr. Treweek (a foundation Faculty representative on this Association's committee) was appointed "to assist the Dean with interviews and other routine matters" (7 November 1951, *Minutes*, p. 170). The constant trend since then has been increasing willingness on the part of Faculty to delegate executive powers to the Dean, who has increasingly apportioned these powers between himself and his sub-dean or sub-deans. There is no limitation on the possible number of sub-deans, but until 1969 there was a single sub-dean: the ideal and necessary figure is now recognized as three or four—I have three and a half in my usual spirit of compromise.

Student numbers have not increased in parallel to staff increases: my own department for example had in 1956 ten full-time staff for 1248 students; in 1974 it had five times as many full-time staff for only 400 more students (1688). But student problems have increased more than proportionately and the Faculty's executive

officers and the Registrar's staff on whom they rely so heavily are kept very busy indeed by a bewildering range of individual cases, some of compelling subtlety.

In 1971 a new element entered Faculty's procedures by the creation of committees to whom powers over student problems were specifically delegated. The Dean himself was given a general power to act on all student applications and the way in which this works in practice may be of interest to you. Since 1971 all students' requests for special treatment of one sort or another have come initially before the Dean or, more usually, the sub-dean to whom he has delegated specific types of cases. I, for example, have delegated to individual sub-deans the power to give credit for courses completed outside the Faculty, power to admit students to Honours schools where they lack the usual qualifications, power to award discontinuations without failure, power to admit to M.A. or Ph.D. candidature and power to admit non-degree students. The decisions in such cases are made by the sub-dean on the recommendation of appropriate Heads of Departments. Where the sub-dean is in doubt, he refers the case to the Admissions and Curriculum Committee or to the Post-Graduate Committee. I do likewise over matters such as the award of post-graduate degrees. The Committee therefore sees the jagged top of an iceberg of applications. It will usually reach a decision but if the case is intransigent then, and then only, Faculty will discuss it. Otherwise the outcome of each application is simply reported to Faculty as part of the papers for noting.

Faculty agenda, therefore, contain nowadays much more broad matter for debate and far, far fewer student cases than twenty-one years ago. The passion of this University for information and opinion results in hosts of inquiries being passed on from the Senate or the Professorial Board and, in theory at any rate, the meetings of Faculty are involved with more matters of high principle. I am not sure that I can claim that Faculty rises to these continuing challenges. I am sure that there is less continuity in attendance and therefore more repetition, more unpredictability and more votes which are unrepresentative of the Faculty as a whole—many important matters are carried by a narrow majority with less than 30 members voting. I am equally sure that this does not make the result unreasonable, just as the small numbers do not make the result invalid. But the net result is a Faculty which operates in a way which is much more impersonal and much more remote, in terms of internal relationships, than it used to be. I have, for example, abandoned the good old practice of expressing formal good wishes to those about to leave on sabbatical or of expressing pleased surprise at their ultimate return. I cannot keep track of all the comings and goings in a Faculty of 350, in which so many go off for three or six or nine months of leave in an untidy higgledy-piggledy fashion. And even if I could keep track of the official movements of my colleagues, there is only a one in eight chance that any of them would be present in Faculty to be farewelled or welcomed back.

Yet there is a credit side to the balance. I believe that the relationship between the Faculty executive and students is now closer than it could be when everything

was centralized in the Dean as the sole figure-head and when nearly all decisions were taken *in plena Facultate*. I believe that the growth of staff members which has in a sense eroded the quality and solidarity of Faculty meetings has infinitely improved the chances of individual students engaging in some sort of relationship with members of staff. I believe that in a great undertaking like the University of Sydney which now handles a budget in excess of \$40 million a year the Faculty system is still alive and well and that the sheer scale of our teaching and research requires more than ever the co-ordinating role of individual faculties. Faculties need their students: they also need their graduates. The continuing mutual loyalty of the Faculty of Arts and the Arts Association, crystallized in the institution of inaugural lectures, is good evidence that for all the massive changes in Faculty management, in the complexity of problems, in the range of subjects and options offered—the departments of Fine Arts, Linguistics, Indonesian and Malayan Studies and Oriental Studies have all been created since 1951—for all these changes there is still an irreducible and indestructible entity which inspires something or other among its members and its graduates. Every institution needs its Friends and I count the Faculty of Arts lucky still to have its Arts Association.

I thank you all very warmly for inviting me to speak tonight and I wish the Association a happy coming-of-age.