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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Last November the Executive Board met in Stuttgart for its regular interconference business meeting, the main items of which Helen Harrison has summarized in this issue of the PHONOGRAPHIC BULLETIN. The composition of the Executive Board that will take office after the 1984 conference was one question that occupied our discussions.

Of course, neither serving presidents nor any other current Board members have any prerogative on the choice of the succession. Nor indeed have they any influence beyond that which every other IASA member also enjoys. Lack of statutory power does not however preclude lack of interest and, at a mid-point in our own term of office, it is hardly surprising that we should engage in some speculation about our successors. Fundamental in these thoughts was the question of the Association's electoral system itself. That is to say, have we got it right? Both inside and outside the present Board I detect some doubts!

In the course of its history IASA has operated two different methods for electing its officers. Before the 1978 conference in Lisbon it was a function of the serving Executive Board to recommend its successors to a so-called Nominating Committee which, provided its members approved of the candidates who were proposed, had the task of presenting them in the form of a "slate" on which IASA members attending the conference during election year voted either to accept or to reject. Not surprisingly the system had its critics! Allegations against the procedures included the contentions that Executive Boards had become self-perpetuating oligarchies, were insensitive to the wishes of the membership as a whole, which was thereby prevented from making any real expression of its own will. In a nutshell, it was undemocratic.

Having touched on some of its alleged faults it seems only fair also to mention some of the arguable benefits of IASA's first electoral procedure. It permitted a selection of officers more representative of the international distribution of IASA's members; it offered greater insurance that those elected would be people regularly able to attend conferences and Board meetings; it provided the Board with members who had sufficient practical resources to be able to support the burgeoning activities of the young, small and financially weak Association.

This catalogue of advantages and disadvantages could be greatly expanded, but I think that the foregoing conveys the essence of our original statutes. Within them a practical balance was struck by our founding fathers between democracy and utility. As a result Constitution Mark I served the interests of the new Association well enough for several years.

On 18 July 1978 Constitution Mark II came into effect, partly as a result of growing criticism of its predecessor but also as a result of a general constitutional revision that was instituted by the Executive Board itself. From this date elections to the Board became the statutory responsibility of the entire membership. Any (paid-up!) member of IASA could henceforth stand for office and propose or second favoured candidates. Serving members of the Board had the same rights, but no more. The International Association of Sound Archives thereby was democratized. (A process which becomes complete at the Washington conference, if the General Assembly there approves the introduction of postal voting.)

After the Board elections in Budapest - the first to be held under the new arrangements - some of the criticisms made of Mark I were to be heard whispered of Mark II. "There is only one candidate for each office; we have no choice!" "There are two British members; the Board is unrepresentative!" "These are the same old faces; the oligarchy still rules!" Ironically IASA's first "democratic" election had produced a result which was in many ways identical to the kinds of Boards which had emerged during preceding paternalistic successions.

What conclusions may we draw? It is that the kind of people recognized by earlier Boards of well-intentioned members to be good candidates, tend to be also the people who would get themselves nominated for office under any electoral system? Is it that the large majority of members are disinterested in actively using the rights they now possess? Are most of our members actually unaware of the "new" procedures? Is the present electoral system simply unsuitable for this Association? At this distance in time, it seems likely that the Board which is elected in 1984 by Mark II procedures will have to consider some of these questions and come up with answers which, possibly, may lead on to electoral system Mark III. Or maybe next time

Members who are not familiar with the present constitutional basis of Executive Board elections can, and indeed should, become so, by writing to our Membership Secretary for a copy of IASA's statutes. The future composition of the Board, and with it much of the professional development of the Association, rests for the moment with the membership as a whole. It is much to be hoped that a sufficient number of colleagues make use of their opportunities so that our 1984 elections will be as democratic, as representative and as competitive as the terms of electoral system Mark II envisaged and allow.

I wish a happy and successful 1983 to sound archivists anywhere.

D.G.L.