

CHAPTER TWENTY

AUTHORITY AND THE FACULTY

It will be remembered that the original intent of the State Board was to give the faculty a primary role in the internal conduct of the Normal. Suitable for a very small institution, in harmony with a fairly widespread but diminishing practice of the time, this concept of the role of a faculty met, as we have seen, varying fortunes in the century that followed, and ended under President Munson in being completely denied. The re-appearance, under vastly changed circumstances, of the belief that the faculty in an institution of higher education should play an important administrative role found especially vigorous and aggressive expression at the Normal under Munson and Eugene Elliott.

The tenure of Munson, second only in length to that of McKenny as of the time, drew to a close in 1948. The authoritarian character of his administration had become increasingly galling to the faculty. Not that academic freedom was threatened, not that the faculty were overburdened with administrative committee work (the exact opposite was, in fact, the case), not that the operation of the college was inefficient, not that the educational purpose and function of the institution were being poorly served. But times were changing rapidly; the administrative tone was paternalistic, the policies were extremely conservative. With the close of World War II the day had definitely passed in America when it could be said that "The faculty are employees; the trustees are employers; the president is the superintendent of the plant." The spirit of the times would no longer tolerate an Alston Ellis (President of Ohio University) "standing at his

office window clocking professors as they arrived on the campus each morning.”¹

Perhaps as a microcosm of institutional travail accompanying birth of a different concept, the story is worth telling.

At the Normal, the initiation of a faculty movement for participation in the administration of the College was particularly difficult because faculty meetings were held once a year, and then only for the purpose of approving lists of graduates and conducting minor business of a routine nature. To the extent that there was backing for change by any organized group in the initial stages, it came from the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors. At the national level this Association had been studying the problem of faculty participation for 30 years. In 1917, it had set up its “Committee T” on the Place and Function of Faculties in College and University Government. Its detailed reports of 1920 and 1937 formed a solid platform on which a faculty might stand in an effort to gain recognition. Article IV of the latter report stated categorically:

The faculty of the university at large or its authorized representatives, and the faculty of each college in the university, should have ultimate legislative power over educational policies within the jurisdiction of that faculty, and should control its own organization and its committees.²

Concern over the matter of faculty participation in college administration was manifested at the local AAUP chapter’s first meeting of 1946–1947. Meetings for the year were scheduled as a series of discussions on specific areas of college administration and procedure. The national AAUP *Bulletin* had published articles on “What Makes a Good College President,” “Ethical Argument for Democratic University Administration,” “Choosing College Presidents,” and “What Should be the Qualifications for the President of Utopia Teacher’s College?” These articles were of particular interest to the local group as Munson’s retirement approached. The faculty did not want a continuation of arbitrary rule; they were intent on insuring a more democratic type of administration by the proper choice of the next president. They strongly desired to have a voice in that selection.

In the spring of 1947 a faculty movement developed. It began by way of informal meetings of a few who were interested. The initia-

tive came from a member of the local AAUP chapter, J. Henry Owens, chairman of the Foreign Languages Department. It was Owens who led the way through the next two years until, under the new president, a form of faculty government was established. The first approach, however, was an attempt to secure from the State Board consent to faculty participation in the selection of a president.

In May, 1947, a call was issued to all members of the faculty who might be interested in the question of faculty participation in the choice of the next president. A goodly number of the faculty responded. A dollar was solicited to defray expenses. It was readily contributed. An executive committee was chosen.³ This committee proceeded to obtain interviews with individual members of the State Board. In June, in a frank letter to Munson, which included a copy of the petition that had been prepared requesting a voice in the selection of a new president and which had been submitted to members of the State Board, the committee said:

This committee has met with the individual members of the Board and secured their approval of the steps taken. The committee would be delighted to meet with you any time at your convenience to discuss its operations and plans, and to receive any advice you may care to give.

Munson, who held that choice of a president was not a matter for faculty participation, did not arrange for such a meeting. The minutes of the State Board for June make no reference to this petition. In early August, however, a letter was received from the Secretary of the Board which said in part:

This letter will acknowledge your letter concerning the selection of a president for Michigan State Normal College. The Board operates as a unit. In accordance with the best educational practice the members consider problems of policy as a board rather than as individuals. After careful consideration of your request it was decided to wait until President Munson officially resigns before going about the business of choosing a new president.

In February, 1948, the committee announced that it had met with the State Board and presented the petition formally, together with supporting petitions from alumni and a copy of a statement taken from the AAUP *Bulletin*. They were, they said, assured by the Board that it would take official action as soon as it had had time to

study the petition, and would communicate its decision to the committee.⁴

On March 23, 1948, the morning papers carried the announcement that Eugene B. Elliott had been selected by the Board as the new president. The reaction of the faculty group was one of extreme disappointment. The committee drew up a statement which they gave to the press. It read:

The faculty has never taken a position concerning Dr. Elliott. It has felt that the best interests of the State of Michigan would be served by canvassing the whole United States for the best candidates. It has felt that the reputation of the College deserved that. The State Board of Education should conduct a thorough search for the best man even though the field be limited to the State of Michigan. The faculty offered its aid to the Board in such a quest. The Board did not see fit to follow these suggestions and did not consult further with the faculty.⁵

There is ample ground to assume that the Board held the view that a college president, to be effective, must in no way be beholden to his faculty. His decisions must, inevitably, meet at times with disapproval if not outright opposition. His responsibility must be directly and solely to the board that hired him, and he must feel secure at all times in doing that which, in his view, would be in the best interests of the institution. With this outlook, it was natural to take the position that the faculty were meddling in a matter that was none of their business.

Up to this time attention had been directed to securing a list of candidates for the presidency which might in due time be presented to the State Board. Now however, in light of the failure to obtain a role in selection of a president, the committee concentrated on the formulation of a faculty charter and constitution. In a series of news letters, the faculty were kept informed. That of March 12, 1948, began as follows:

Your faculty committee has felt that the necessary corollary to its efforts to obtain a voice in the selection of the successor to the presidency of this college is the formulation of a plan of faculty organization . . . The hierarchial and authoritarian form of government that prevails in many of our colleges and universities is an anachronism altogether out of harmony with the aims and needs of a university designed to represent and serve a democratic society . . . The purpose is not to usurp any of the rightful

prerogatives of the executive . . . the object is to bring to bear the collective experience and intelligence of the faculty on every aspect of the activities of the university.

The code of principles drawn up and approved by the national AAUP was quoted: “There ought to be a close understanding between the faculty and the board of trustees . . . The general faculty should participate with the trustees in the nomination of a president, and the faculty of a school or division should have a voice in selecting the dean who presides over that school.”

For the task of formulating a charter, the membership on the Faculty Committee was increased to ten.⁶ By April 5, tentative proposals were presented for faculty reaction. In a statement of policy, the committee said:

It [the Committee] believes that, subject to the constitutional controls exercised over the college by the State Board of Education, the faculty can play a considerably greater role than it has in the past. It does not in any way contemplate removal of authority from the President, the deans, or other administrative officials . . .

As to the president, the statement is interesting in its revelation of the faculty concept of this position:

The role of the President in relation to such a constitution is not discussed, because his place should be apparent. He is the leader of the college, a symbol of the college to all outsiders, and the fountain of activity and encouragement to the faculty and students. He sets the tone of the college. He presents college affairs to the State Board of Education and, if need be, to the legislature. He talks with the alumni, keeps them conversant with faculty and student affairs, fires their enthusiasm for the college, encourages them to send excellent students, and inspires them to make financial and intellectual contributions to the institution. He speaks to town groups and others . . . supervises the budgetary matters of the college with the end of promoting economic management of the college and of getting all possible financial aid from the state and from private individuals . . . attends national and regional meetings . . . to keep abreast of what other colleges are doing and to widen his vision . . . from a broad perspective [he] harmonizes college and departmental activities to promote efficiency and good will . . . sits on important committees to lend encouragement and judgment . . . presides at general faculty meetings . . . supervises the problems of maintenance of college properties and plans for the physi-

cal growth of the college . . . supervises the problems of clerical and office workers . . . initiates measures of all sorts for faculty consideration, and in like ways aids and encourages the students. He is, indeed, the prime figure of the college . . .

One is reminded of the statement made by Rutherford B. Hayes, when a member of the Ohio State University Board, where he enumerated the qualities of "fine appearance," "commanding presence," "fine speaker," "great scholar," "great teacher," "a preacher," "winning manners," "tact so that he can get along with and govern the faculty," "popular with students," "trained in business," "a man of affairs," "a great administrator"—and ended by saying "Gentlemen, there is no such man."

One proposal was to cause serious trouble at a later time, namely, that departments of instruction of the college should be headed by a chairman elected from the staff for a limited term by the members of their respective departments. Such procedure would, it was felt by many, tend to encourage faculty politiking. It was this extreme feature of the proposed constitution which raised serious doubts in some minds where otherwise a generally favorable reaction might have developed.

By May 10, the charter was ready for faculty approval. The favorable vote required for passage was set at two-thirds. Ninety-three per cent of the faculty voted; the charter was adopted but with not a vote to spare.⁷

On May 26, representatives of the faculty met with the State Board to seek approval of the document.⁸ Gerald Sanders (head of the English Department) made the opening statement for the faculty. Charles Burns (president of the Board) spoke for the Board. The session was a lengthy one. In its report of that meeting to the faculty the committee said:

After almost two hours of debate, the committee stated its case as follows: that it felt that the basic principles of the Charter were sound and necessary in the long run; that any power allotted to the Faculty must derive from the State Board of Education, the constitutional repository of power; and that the committee preferred no charter rather than to accept one via the President because of our belief that continuity of policy is imperative.

The faculty committee had, as we have seen in its communication with the faculty, asserted that it did not "in any way contemplate

removal of authority from the President,” but the Board gained a different impression. The minutes of that meeting read as follows:

A delegation of faculty members of the Michigan State Normal College presented a proposed charter to the Board involving a faculty chairman who would have coordinate authority with the President of the institution.

The Board adopted the following resolution on the spot:

This matter is referred to the President of the College. It is definitely understood by everyone concerned that the State Board of Education reposes administrative and executive responsibility solely in the President of the College and therefore matters relating to internal organization or procedure in the College are subject always to his determination or approval. This is affirming a policy which has prevailed in relation to each Michigan College of Education since its establishment.⁹

The resolution was read to the committee as the session ended, and induced bitter feeling.¹⁰ Reporting their experience later to the faculty, the committee said:

Inasmuch as the committee considered this meeting as merely an opportunity to expound the principles of faculty participation in college government, this action was astounding . . . The Board's decree disapproves this approach, and perpetuates the authoritarian tradition, whereby all power is delegated to the President of the College.

In October, after the new president had assumed his duties, the committee was ready to submit to the faculty a revised version of the constitution. In announcing this, the committee said:

Your committee recommends this proposal to you as the best working agreement possible for the time being . . . The President has . . . signified his enthusiastic consent to the establishment of the organs specified in this constitutional draft . . . It should be made clear to the faculty that the machinery hereby set up will function only in an advisory capacity.

The “machinery” referred to was a General Faculty which would meet quarterly; a Faculty Council, to meet monthly; and committees to be elected by the General Faculty. In addition, the College and each of the Laboratory Schools were to be separately organized, hold monthly meetings, and organize committees. It is noteworthy that

although specific disclaimer was made as to exercise of authority, and it was clearly advertised that the faculty government would function "only in an advisory capacity," there was written into the revised constitution, both at the General Faculty and the School Faculty levels, the statement that each "shall be a legislative body." At the all-campus level, this legislative body was to be "concerned with all matters that involve the general welfare of the Michigan State Normal College." At the college and school level, it would be "concerned with all matters that specifically involve their respective schools."

Use of the term "legislative" was unfortunate. The failure at any stage to define clearly a sphere of interest that could convincingly be argued to belong exclusively to the faculty led to future discord and an ultimate weakening of the faculty position.¹¹ However, the revised constitution was adopted and went into immediate effect. Bylaws were drawn up and approved, and standing committees established. Noteworthy was the fact that the list of committees was considerably enlarged over traditional lists, covering such novel areas as Integration of Curriculum, College Aims and Objectives, Budget, Health and Safety, Buildings and Grounds, Faculty Welfare, Faculty Social Activities and Faculty Fund, Personnel and Psychological Services, and Elections.

In the period from May, 1947, to September, 1948, (when a revised constitution was finally adopted and placed in operation) a tremendous amount of time and energy were expended by many members of the faculty in the effort to achieve a more satisfactory type of administration. Leaders of the movement appeared to give by far the major part of their time, energy, and thought to this project. One can only conjecture the price paid in terms of educational discipline and progress of the thousands of students (on and off-campus), and in professional improvement and contributions of staff which are part of the normal expectations from college professors. How many class sessions became routine, how many tests were not given, how much of the inspiration that is so catching in a professionally alive and dedicated teacher was lacking can only be surmised. Yet under the existing circumstances, there was no alternative means to the end sought.

For some years the faculty organization operated with vigor and enthusiasm, well-supported by the President. In his annual report for the year 1950-1951 the Dean of Administration could say:

The climate on the campus has been generally good. I believe I can say that as between the faculties and the administration there is a general spirit of confidence and good will.

By late 1953, however, the question of department chairman as opposed to department head became acute. A department chairman would be elected by his department and would serve a limited term. A department head would be appointed by the president for an indefinite term. There was strong faculty sentiment for the concept of department chairmen, and this had been embodied in the constitution. The issue became real in the English Department where a particularly difficult situation existed as to the naming of a head. It was known that the president favored the department head concept and would like to settle the problem by appointment. As the next meeting of the State Board was imminent, a special meeting of the General Faculty was called for via petition, as provided for in the constitution. The petition read:

. . . whereas doubts have been expressed publicly on the constitutionality and propriety of the vote in the English Department to terminate its chairmanship. Therefore, we the following members of the College Faculty petition for a special meeting of the College Faculty to be held prior to the date on which the President shall feel it is necessary to present any recommendation on the English Department to the Board of Education (other than postponement of the matter if it has already been communicated to the Board). etc.¹²

The meeting was promptly held (the president attending), the question was well threshed out on the floor, and the outcome was a recommendation favoring adherence to the constitutional provision for department chairman.

The fact that the faculty government possessed only an advisory function in relation to the president had, as we have noted, been clearly established and was generally understood. However, the constitution still retained a clause that, read by itself, would indicate a contrary intent. This statement read that the faculty organization was “a legislative body concerned with all matters that involve the general welfare of Eastern Michigan College.” Perhaps because of this retention from the original constitution of the word “legislative,” with its absolute connotation, perhaps because of the vigor of

the discussion on the floor, the president chose to interpret the meeting as a challenge to his authority.

The next day he took the matter to the State Board and received not only explicit authority but direction to supervise the departments through an appointive department head. At its January meeting, the Board adopted the following resolution:

On motion, the Board voted that each college department of the Michigan Colleges of Education shall be supervised by a department head recommended by the President of each institution. A person now holding the office of department chairman may complete the term for which he is named unless he resigns or the office is otherwise vacated. To be given immediate effect.

At the same meeting, the president settled the problem in the English Department by securing the Board's approval of John Sattler as head.

On February 3, he issued to the faculty a bulletin entitled, "President's Statement on Faculty Organization." In this statement he pointed out the obvious and well-understood fact that Normal operated under the authority of the State Board of Education and that this Board had delegated to him the administrative responsibility "as the single executive authority." Then, however, he proceeded to issue an edict: the present faculty constitution, except where it was inconsistent with the State Board's prescription as to the department head, could continue to exist only "until modified—but not beyond July 1."

This was severely damaging to faculty morale and to the relationship between faculty and administration. Henceforth, the faculty organization would be viewed as the president's organization, to be modified or even discarded at will. The strong faculty leadership that had pioneered the concept of faculty participation was antagonized and lost interest. Confidence in the president, who had approved the existing constitution, with its prescription for department chairmen, was undermined. The feeling grew that the College was being directed as a matter of expediency rather than of principle. The fear expressed by Sanders in the meeting with the State Board on the original charter had proved well-founded, that if the document were not approved by the Board, it could not be relied upon.

A new constitution was drafted in which the word “advisory” was written into the title. The committee structure was greatly reduced and membership brought within reach of presidential influence. It was approved in June by a reluctant faculty intent on retaining the principle of faculty participation. The statement of “Purpose and Control of the Michigan Colleges of Education,” long a feature of the annual catalog, was dropped. This statement had been explicit both as to the source of control and the legislative purpose of the College. In its place appeared a brief paragraph entitled “Government of the College,” which reminded its readers of the authority vested in the State Board of Education, and that the school was financed from tax monies.

In 1960, the Faculty Council, on its own initiative, was reorganized and enlarged to secure a representative from each instructional department and laboratory school in addition to the twelve elected at large. In 1963, as the result of unexpected reverses, the president changed his stand and gave the Council more than advisory status, though still without definition. The State Board showed a marked interest in securing the cooperation of the Council and prospects were more favorable for ultimate official recognition of a definite faculty role and responsibility in the administration of the, by now, University.

A footnote from two decades after the formation of the Faculty Council might here be appropriate. In their newly-found enthusiasm for democracy in administration the faculty extended the principle to include the students. A Student Council was encouraged and promptly became a reality. Student representation was provided for on certain faculty committees where student interests appeared to be directly involved, and occasional meetings between Faculty Council and Student Council were arranged. Transition from student participation to student domination was not envisioned. The phrase “Student Power” had not yet been coined.

