

THE PASSING OF PRESIDENTS

It was a sad November. We lost our president, **Esmé**; and we'd already lost our VP External, **Tina**, and then the Speaker stepped down, and last year **we lost people too [Dana, Rita]**. Of course, we're a student organization: people are here for a year or so and then leave, but still ...

Josh, our Interim VP External, asked me about the last time we lost a president. In fact, he said, there was a year when we lost two presidents, 1978, and he wondered how that happened.

So let me take you back to **1978**. Here's what Council looked like that year: **G.22a** That's the horseshoe table we used to sit around in the old Student Union Building. I wonder if you can see me in that picture – but no, I wasn't here yet. I thought the three presidents might be there, but I'm not sure: that might be one of them at the far left with his head on his hand.

Anyway, Council, or the **SRA** as it was called then: the **Student Representative Assembly**. The late 70's were a time of experimentation, when we radically rewrote our bylaws and put all the Student Senators, all 17 of them, on Council, along with the two BoG reps and Constituency reps. And this big Council of 52 members **[G.22a]** chose the Executive: there were no campus-wide elections; the President and the rest of the Executive served at the pleasure of Council. This was part of a move to shift power away from the President and make them more just a chair or a spokesperson.

Anyway, in March of 1978 Council, the SRA or Council, elected **Bruce Armstrong**: there's Bruce. The vote was 20-16. I've mentioned Bruce before; he was our **Grover Cleveland**. You've heard of Grover Cleveland? American President two separate times. Just like **Bruce**. Bruce served as President in 1978, then left office, then in 1980 became president again.

But I've been telling the story wrong. I used to say he stepped down as President because of illness, but that's not true. He did fall ill, but that was later, after he was President the first time, and it wasn't a long illness, though it was dramatic enough to make the Ulysses.

Anyway, Bruce had to step down in September 1978 for academic reasons. Or to put it another way, the University stepped in and removed our President: those bullies! There's the mean old University President, **Doug Kenny**: he said Bruce had to go. Well, it wasn't really him. It was the Senate Admissions Committee, or the Registrar, or the Dean of Science, George Michael Volkoff **[https://www.library.ubc.ca/archives/u_arch/volkoff.pdf]** Interestingly, I've looked up Dean Volkoff and found out that he worked with J. Robert Oppenheimer on the Manhattan Project. Not sure if he made it into that movie this year. He also worked on black holes.

Anyway, **Bruce** had to go: because of his academic standing, the University said he would have to give up his extra-curricular activities, including being president of the AMS. That's not right, said Bruce, but he left – for a while. The following year he was back as a student representative on the Board of Governors, and the year after that he was president again.

Speaking of the Board of Governors, after Bruce stepped down the next President was one of the student BoG reps, Paul Sandhu [**G.40**] – there he is presenting the Great Trekker Award to Stan Persky, a famous campus radical from the 60's (Paul is the one on the right). When he received the award, Persky asked if he could keep the actual trophy, which we don't actually allow, so then he asked if he could just take it home for a couple of nights and sleep with it to see if they were compatible.

But enough about Stan, who was rather a character. Back to Paul, who was named acting president right away, but then wasn't sure he wanted to continue: after all in those days the presidency was a rather weak position. But eventually he ran and the SRA chose him in a 20-12 vote. And I wonder again if that's him at the far left in the **SRA** photo we have.

You may notice that Paul was both AMS President and a member of the Board of Governors. Not the only time that's happened. In 2007 **Jeff Friedrich** ran for both BoG rep and President and won both elections. Nowadays we worry about conflict of interest for BoG reps because they sit on our Council and yet have a fiduciary duty to the University. Back then, not so much, though **Paul** got in trouble with the University over this very thing, leaking information he received in a closed BoG session: well, leaking is perhaps not the word: he gave an interview to the Ubysey to talk about funding for the new Asian centre, something that had been discussed confidentially at the Board. The Board was not amused and suspended him from their next meeting.

At first I thought they'd removed him from the Board altogether because he did leave the Board, but not for another month or so, and then only because his term on the Board was up. He was only on Council because he was on the Board, so when his term on the Board ended, well, it was time to choose the third president of the year, Valgeet Johl.

I would love to be able to show you a picture of Valgeet, but I have been unable to find one. Maybe she's in that **SRA photo**. Anyway, she ran for election to finish off the 78-79 term, winning in a very close vote, 19-18, in January 1979, and then her term ended at the AGM in March: in those days we did turnover at the AGM, and the AGM was in the spring. She could have run again after that, but chose not to; instead she ran and was elected to the position of External Affairs Officer, like our VP External. And that was the end of our year of three presidents.

After that **Bruce Armstrong** came back, first as a BoG rep and then in 1980 as president, at which point he decided that this SRA system was a no go, and he drafted new bylaws which restored campus-wide elections for the Executive and removed all

but two of the Student Senators from Council: also changing the name back to Council. In other words, the bylaws we operate under now are essentially the ones Bruce wrote more than 40 years ago, ending our strange experiment with Council electing the President.

And that is perhaps all I'll say about Presidents.