

On Conducting Meetings With Ease and Authority

STURGIS' STANDARD CODE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE. By Alice Sturgis. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.; 268 pp.; \$2.50.

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER REVISED. 75th Anniversary Edition. By General Henry A. Robert. Chicago: Scott, Foresman Co.; 326 pp.; \$2.10.

NEW WAYS TO BETTER MEETINGS. By Bert and Frances Strauss. New York: The Viking Press; 177 pp.; \$2.95.

Reviewed by
S. I. Hayakawa

LIVING at a time when each new controversy appears to be even more heated than the last, one reads with special curiosity and interest books dealing technically with the processes of discussion and debate. For, despite the low esteem in which diplomats and politicians are held in some quarters, the only alternative to coercion in the resolution of conflicts has always been the establishing of agreements through the exchange of words. How words may be exchanged in such ways as to enhance the possibilities of agreement and to diminish the need of coercion has always been, therefore, a matter of concern to all civilized societies.

The rules of parliamentary procedure, refined and improved through the centuries, may be regarded as a social invention—perhaps among the most characteristic social inventions of the Western world—a device by means of which people in groups may arrive at common decisions while permitting every individual an equal voice in helping to shape them. The parliamentary code of group decision-making is the answer to a question which must have puzzled many an absolute monarch: "If everybody were given an equal voice, how could you have anything but anarchy?"

Seen in such a historical light, the formal resolution, the motion to amend, the rising to a point of order, the motion to table, begin to seem less like things we patiently have to sit through, and more like a continuing reaffirmation of democracy. I must confess feeling, while reading Mrs. Sturgis' "Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure" and Robert's "Rules of Order," a mounting sense of responsibility: I should know these rules better; I must try to be a better committee member, a better participant; these rules are part of what I talk about when I say I prefer a democratic society. I think

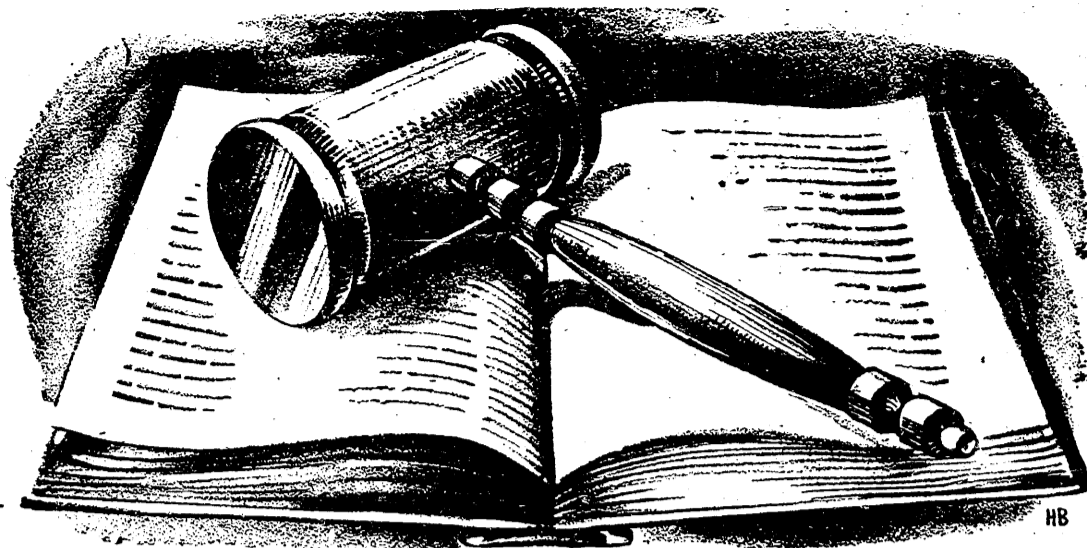
(S. I. Hayakawa is editor of the semantics magazine "ETC" and author of "Language in Action" and other books.)

most readers will feel the same way and be glad that these books are obtainable.

YET there is a difference between the two.

Any customary and prescribed way of behaving (to accomplish no matter what) tends to become a rite, and having become a rite, the original purpose tends to become subverted. The purpose of parliamentary rules of order is to facilitate agreement and decision-making. Too great a preoccupation with rules and their refinements can result in parliamentary ritualism to a degree that subverts the purpose of debate. The tendency of the Robert's "Rules" is ritualistic; the tendency of the Sturgis "Standard Code" is antiritualistic and functional. This is not to say that a sensible chairman cannot operate well with either book to guide him. But I suspect that anyone whose aim in a meeting is to confuse people and prevent wise decisions will find more technicalities with which to snarl up the proceedings in Robert than in Sturgis.

The difference between the two books is revealed first of all in their language. Robert is uninhibited in his use of technical terms; Sturgis reduces them to a mini-



mum. Robert gives careful prescriptions as to what to do in almost every conceivable situation; Sturgis simplifies the rules where possible and is more ready to give leeway to the chairman's evaluations of the exigencies of the moment. For example, Robert says: "If it is desired to transact business out of its order, it is necessary to suspend the rules, which can be done by a two-thirds vote. But, as each resolution or report comes up, a majority can at once lay it on the table, and thus reach any question which it desires first to dispose of." In contrast is the

ruling in Sturgis: "The order of business should not be permitted to interfere with the business of a meeting. For example, if a special committee is ready to report but a standing committee is not yet ready, the presiding officer should not hesitate to call upon the chairman of the special committee to report."

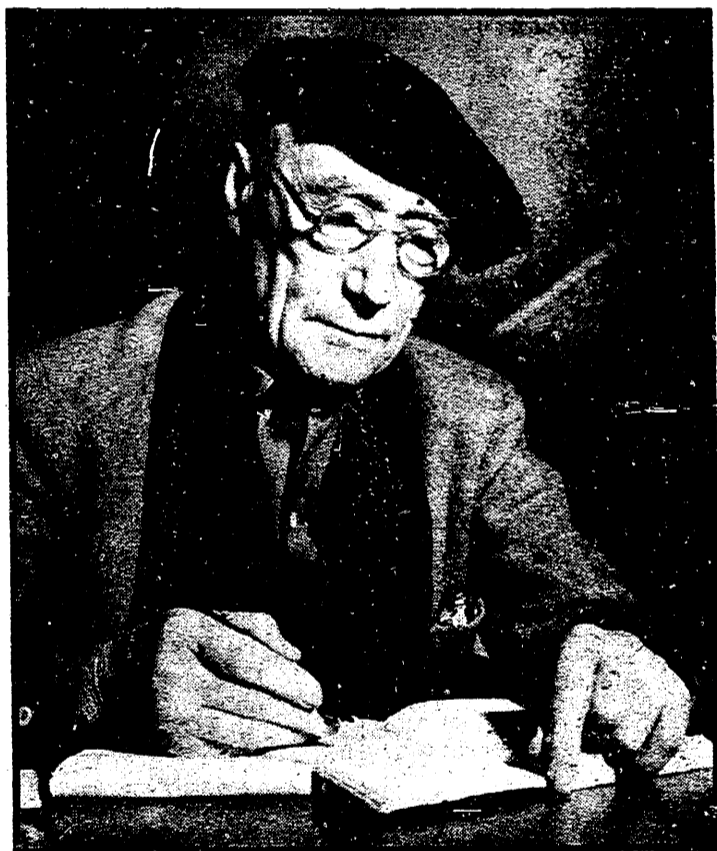
Altogether, the Sturgis book is easier to read, easier to understand, easier to apply. With its emphasis on the reasons for the rules, it never lets the reader forget the purposes of agreement and decision-making for which the rules were invented.

SO MUCH for the books on formal debate and action in democratic gatherings. "New Ways to Better Meetings" by Bert and Frances Strauss is an attempt to present, in practical and usable manner, the entirely new concept of discussion and decision-making that arises from the science (or art) of group dynamics. The highly original and creative psychologist, Kurt Lewin, taught his followers techniques for studying human beings in groups, including the study of why some people talk too much while others talk too little, and what differences in the behavior of chairmen lead to what differences in the effectiveness of groups. Out of these researches there arose new ways of handling meetings which often have incredible results: The silent begin to talk; the overdominating begin to

be co-operative; obstructionists stop obstructing; the lofty and indifferent become members of the team. The Strausses have written what I believe to be the first popular exposition of the ideas suggested by group dynamics. The explanations of the new meeting procedures are simple and vivid; the psychological reasons for the effectiveness of the techniques are not gone into deeply, but are sufficiently indicated so that even a skeptical reader will feel impelled to try them out at his next PTA meeting.

Will discussion techniques suggested by group dynamics ever supplant those of formal debate? I think it is possible to a large degree since, especially in small conferences, the techniques of group dynamics often render debate unnecessary. The debate rests on the assumption that a problem is solved when a majority attains a "victory" over a minority; group dynamics techniques are based on a conviction that only unanimous decisions are truly effective and seek by every means to establish the fullest possible communication among group members.

The parliamentarian, as he acquaints himself with group dynamics, will find many of the old "rules of order" outmoded and unnecessary. Yet the need for formalizing (and therefore legalizing) group decisions will remain, so that while parliamentary debate may eventually lose ground, there will still be the need for parliamentary rules for formal action.



Andre Gide at work

On the High Seas

SEAGOING GAUCHO. By Ernesto Uriburu. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.; 218 pp.; \$3.

FOUR Argentines in a 50-foot yacht, cruising along North Africa and in the Mediterranean, and returning by Columbus' route,

manage to enjoy themselves. The voyage was inspired by that most serious of purposes, to have a good time, and evidently the skipper, who writes the story, had a good time writing the book as well.

Anyone looking for a light hearted, escapist book, will do well to look into this one. For the yachtsmen, the Gauchos' specifications, supplies and itinerary will be found at the back of the book.

THE GREAT BUCCANEER. By Phillip Lindsay. New York: Wilfred Funk; 305 pp.; \$3.50.

MR. LINDSAY has previously published 31 books, most of them novels, including one about an affair on a desert island which made the pocket books not long ago. He writes with headlong haste, letting the clauses fall where they may: "Now at last was Morgan admiral of the buccaneers, although from his masthead was broken no skull and crossbones of conventional romance, but the cross of England, for he had the king's commission in his pocket." Sometimes things are even more involved. But it is a good rousing biography, "Being the Life, Death and Extraordinary Adventures of Sir Henry Morgan, Buccaneer and Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica."

Life among the pirates was rather rough, and the author relishes the details of rum bouts and women of easy virtue as much as the episodes of the sacking of Panama. But, as he suggests, probably the pirates weren't much worse than the soldiers in the religious wars which were going on in Europe at the time.

—J. W. H.

Gide's Last Journal

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE, VOLUME IV: 1939-1949. Edited by Justin O'Brien. New York: Alfred A. Knopf; 341 pp.; \$6.

Reviewed by
William Rose

"SOME days it seems to me that if I had at hand a good pen, good ink, and good paper, I should without difficulty write a masterpiece." In this next-to-last entry in Andre Gide's last journal, written when he was 79 years old and ailing, the essential quality of Gide's mark is perhaps indicated.

There is something awesome about the persistence of that feeble old hand in setting down at this late date such vehement evidence of its owner's interest in life and art. Yet after following Gide's thoughts through the final volume of his remarkable personal record, the reader is struck hardly at all by this entry. An intense preoccupation with the activity of living, on all its levels, characterizes every page.

But we do not need the Journals to discover this central qual-

ity of Gide's work. His novels, plays, and essays make it sufficiently apparent. The special value of the Journals, Volume Four as well as its predecessors, is the portrait they afford of the personality of the writer. Of almost equal interest, however is the singular account of an era—1889-1949—which they present.

Historical interest is particularly dominant in the first two-thirds of Volume Four. Here, despite his avowal to remain aloof, we get an almost day-by-day account of Gide's reactions to the events preceding and following the fall of France. During this period, when he lived first in the south of France and then in North Africa, his devotion to his native country and his concern for its future is apparent as nowhere else in the Journals.

GIDE is, as we should expect, though, no ordinary patriot. He finds much to admire in the Germans and much to despise in his fellow countrymen. Often, with typical honesty, he is not even sure which side he is on: "What! Do you really think that all the intelligence, nobility of

Continued on Page 22



Andre Gide in a pensive mood