CHAPTER 8.

SENATE COMMITTEES.
At the third meeting of the Senate, 26 May 1912 Mr. Battye gave notice to move for the establishment of three Standing Committees,

(1) Administration.

To prepare Statutes and revise them. To deal with and advise in regard to matters relating to administration including Executive, Staff and all matters other than matters which are assigned to other Committees.

(2) Finance.

To deal with all matters relating to finance, accounts investments, property, insurances and business generally.

(3) Education.

The functions of the Education Committee concern University, University extension, research work, Lectures, evening Lectures, Correspondence study, Text books, public examinations and cognate matters.

(1) The members appointed to the Administrative Committee were Chancellor (Hackett), Pro Chancellor (Andrews), Sir Walter James, Dr. Mead, T. H. Bath, J. S. Battye and W. Somerville.

(2) Finance Committee - Chancellor, Pro Chancellor, Hon. F. Wilson, Catton Grasby, Sandover, Keenan and Burrows.

(3) Education - Chancellor, Pro Chancellor, Dr. Smith, Dr. Saw, Mrs. Moss, Hon. T. Walker and C. Grasby.

The Education Committee does not appear to have had much to do. It continued in existence up to December 1915 when it was abolished. During the life of this Committee the major energies of the Senate were absorbed in securing accommodation and appointing the Staff. After the staff were appointed the duties assigned to the Education Committee were automatically
taken over by the Professorial Board.

The Administrative Committee has not left much trace of work done and it was also superseeded in December 1915 by the General Purposes Committee. The Senate resolution of that date is:

Moved by Archbishop Riley and seconded by Mr. Hancock "That the number of Committees be reduced to two, Finance and General Purposes and that each Committee at its first meeting elect its own Chairman."

The General Purposes Committee then established did an enormous amount of that condensing and pre-digestion of business which is so necessary for prompt and efficient decisions, by the Senate.

It continued until the growth of the idea of an Academic Board led in April 1931 to it being superseeded by that body.

**ACADEMIC BOARD**

In 1929 Professor Shamn expressed dissatisfaction with the scheme of University Committees. There were in existence at the time the Professorial Board and Senate Committees for Finance, for General Purposes and a grounds Committee. He argued that this system sharply divided the Academic interests from those of general governance with the result that neither branch had that knowledge of the other which he considered necessary in the interest of the University as a whole. So he urged the establishment of what he first called the Board of Faculties. In March 1930 a special Committee was appointed "to consider the possibility of reducing the number of Academic Committees". It reported "After considering the list of Senatorial and Academic Committees and a report from Mr. W. Somerville as to what was done in Sydney it recommended that

(1) The present Senate Committees and the Professorial Board be abolished,

(2) That a General Purposes Committee be appointed
to deal with business at present dealt with by the Finance, the Investments and the Grounds Committees and all other matters be dealt with by a Board of Faculties.

The report of mine here mentioned was briefly that I had found great dissatisfaction in Melbourne particularly among the junior teaching staff at the extent to which University affairs were dominated by Sir John McFarlan and Sir James Barrett who was treasurer. The Registrar Bainbridge did not impress me and the Council was by report a weak body. In Sydney the state of affairs was very different. The Vice Chancellor Dr. Wallace was giving evidence of his determination to eliminate as many Committees as possible and to concentrate as much executive authority as possible in his own hands with, as chief adviser, a Finance Committee consisting of a select and very limited number of City Business men who were in a large way.

The special Committee also recommended giving their Board of Faculties very wide powers over the courses of Study, the selection of examiners, the lecture time tables and many other matters which up to then had been the exclusive function of the Professorial Board. Consideration of the proposals took some time but in June the Academic Board statute was adopted and the first meeting of the Board was held at Irwin Street on 14th April 1931.

Whitfeld had departed on 6 months holiday to Europe.

At this first meeting 10 Professors and 8 members of the Senate were present. The Professorial Board statute had been repealed and the Academic Board had been given very wide powers for in addition to matters transmitted to it by the Senate it was clothed with all the powers of the Professorial Board
over purely academic matters. It could submit to the Senate recommendations as to courses of study, it could recommend examiners, require students to withdraw, control academic ceremonials, make representation to Senate as to removal of Professors and Lecturers, mode of awarding scholarships, etc.

After a short life of 3 years it fell into disfavour. For one thing it was too large but its abolition was mainly due to the realisation that the Academic interests and the governmental functions of the Senate were best kept separate. So in March 1934 the Professorial Board, the General Purposes Committee and the Finance Committee were re-established.

This time the General Purposes Committee lasted until 8th October 1941 when a sub-Committee recommended that it be amalgamated with the Finance Committee. The Chancellor, Dr. Battye was the chief advocate of this but he was merely echoing one of the recommendations by Dr. Wallace of the previous year.

This time the reasons for the abolition of the General Purposes Committee were very different from those given in 1931.

The willingness to do Committee work was in decay and the tendency, to hand over more and more of the executive power to a paid executive, was growing.

This tendency has been marked in many diversified spheres for many years. With Joint Stock Companies the shareholders once exercised a real control over the policy of the Company but their influence has to a large extent ceased and the paid executives are in an impregnable position and do very much what they please. In the Trade Union world unfortunately the same stage has been reached. In the University sphere Vice Chancellors Wallace of Sydney and Medley of Melbourne have led the movement towards unrestrained government by the paid Executives.
When Whitfeld died in 1939 and Mr Parkers' health shortly afterwards broke down the University administration got rather confused. The system existing up to then had depended to a large extent upon Mr Parker's remarkable memory. So when Professor Beasley, as acting Vice Chancellor tried to get the hang of things without Parker's assistance, he being ill, Beasley got badly confused. Instead of seeking the assistance of the firm of auditors who were familiar with Parker's system he alarmed the Chancellor (Batty) and the Chancellor alarmed me (I was Pro Chancellor) with assertions as to the confusion he alleged University affairs were in.

It may be said in passing that when the auditors were brought in not one sixpence was found out of place.

However, as the result of the feeling of uneasiness engendered by Beasley's unfounded assertions it was deemed advisable to get a report from some outside authority on the whole of the University set up. Dr. Wallace the Vice Chancellor of Sydney consented to act. The chief points in his report were:

The University is trying to accomplish too much with its present income, (1) That we had spread ourselves over too many departments; this was of course well known to many; (2) that the University was not large as Universities go and there was no present need for a full time Vice Chancellor and a Registrar was sufficient; (3) Associate Professors were condemned and (4) that the Standing Committee be reduced to two and the Finance and Investment Committees and one for Building and Grounds.

There were other recommendations the discussion of which took some time and assistance and advice was sought from other Universities of Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. The replies from Melbourne and Adelaide were remarkable for the candour and frankness with which they expressed the belief that the Senate or Council should be little more than a rubber stamp, a body to do as little as possible beyond recording and approving whatever the all powerful Vice Chancellor thinks desirable.
Dr. Wallace of Sydney says inter alia:

"The Vice Chancellor should be in the position of the General Manager of a big business ...........
under Wallace in Sydney
It (The Finance Committee) reports only major matters to the Senate for example out of some twenty items it may report four or five. It is largely left to my discretion what to report and what not to report .......................

You will gather from the above that the Vice Chancellor is vested with a great deal of power either by by-law or by consent".

The last word of the quotation "consent" is significant for unless some member of the Senate of the Sydney University has the courage to dissent from the very powerful Vice Chancellor the power of that officer will go on increasing.

Dr. Wallace is a dour Scot and means every word he uses, in contrast the semi humorous style of Mr. Medley, still leaves it quite clear and definite that Mr. Medley "dislikes the Committee system".

"It cramps his style". A quotation from his letter of advice is as follows:

"and the ideal organisation is an autocratic "Vice Chancellor with a subservient Council"
and he is determined to proceed by "a process of attrition trial and error" to by pass committees and get as much power as possible into his own hands.

The increase in executive Control those members of the Senate who are busy professional men, earning large incomes, from the necessity of attending Committees. Dr. Ainslie's argument ran something as follows:

"I cannot attend Committee meetings, consequently I find myself at a disadvantage compared with Committee members when Committee reports are being discussed, therefore Committee's are bad and a General Purposes Committee not required".

The reply to this heresy is that Democracy in its final analysis is government by Committee. I hold it to be fundamental, something beyond agreement, that when a man accepts the Honour of membership of such a body as the Senate he also accepts the obligation
to do his fair share of the Committee work necessary for such bodies to function properly. If the willingness to do Committee work is to decay then the proper course is to give deliberately to the Vice Chancellor the power he has apparently assumed in Sydney and the Senate members can devote their time to other interests.

At the time of writing (1946 April) there is no Committee to condense general business, which does not involve finance, to a form acceptable to a majority of the Senate and as a consequence every item is debated at length by that body. The meetings seldom terminate before 11.30, that is after 4 hours discussion and some members have been compelled to leave to catch bus or train. No member has any opportunity to raise questions of interest under the heading of general business and the power of the Executive goes on increasing.

Our curious exception was made when the number of Committees was reduced in 1941 as the result of the Wallace report. A grounds Committee was continued.

It had been in existence since 1927 and had done a lot of valuable work. There was no reason for its abolition other than the desire to appear sweeping and drastic. It met at infrequent intervals and the tax on anybody's time was negligible. In moving for its abolition the Chancellor (Batty) said he would be content to see Mr. Somerville as a continuing grounds Committee. This seemed to meet with general approval and it was decided that the Grounds Committee should consist of the Vice Chancellor and W. Somerville, with power to co-opt. As no other member of the Senate appeared to take much interest in the grounds and the Senate was so satisfied with what has been done that no co-opting has been thought necessary. When this special form of Grounds Committee
was established (1941) I was Pro Chancellor but the appointment as Grounds Committee was not to the Pro Chancellor but to me personally.

The Investments, Endowment and Building's Committee was formed in May 1943 it was given wide powers of independent action. Its doings and interlaced with the Endowment Lands and will be dealt with under that heading.

As the University develops, the amount of complexity of the business for the wise transaction of which the Senate is responsible, increases rapidly. If a democratic form of government is to be retained the amount of Committee work necessary to condense and co-ordinate this business so that the Senate will not be overwhelmed also increases. Two forces are at work to prevent this being done. The first is that a considerable number of Senators are busy men who value the Honour of being a member of the Senate but begrudge the time Committee work requires. They prefer to attend Senate meetings when it is convenient and simply endorse what the paid Executive desires. The other force is that paid executives if they are men with force of character and energy do not like to be bothered with Committees, they like to have their way of thinking to be unchallenged.

I am afraid these two forces will in time prevail. When they do it will be wise to abolish the Senate and throw the full responsibility for their actions upon the paid executive.

Teaching, Staff and Finance.

Should members of the Teaching Staff who are members of the Senate be members of the Finance Committee? the above question has been debated on several occasions. On 2 occasions the Senate decided it was not desirable with the result that of the
three Professors concerned Ross, Shann and Murdoch. Ross and Shann resigned, but Murdoch retained his position on the Finance as long as he was on the teaching staff? At the Senate meeting, April 1922, Professor Shann, Vice Chancellor raised the question of the personnel of the Finance Committee. Professor Murdoch, being still a member, thereupon Murdoch tendered his resignation. It was moved by Walters and Hancock that the resignation be not accepted. This was carried. The matter then went into abeyance until April 1926 when it was moved by Professor Shann (he had ceased to be Vice 1923) and seconded by Sir Walter James.

"It is inexpedient that in the discharge of its responsibilities in the expenditure of public funds that the members of the salaried staff should be members of the finance committee."

This was carried. Thereupon Professor Ross resigned.

It is to the same point, that two members of the Teaching Staff, Professor Cameron and Beasley, when giving evidence before the Wolff Royal Commission in 1941, spoke and declared their opposition to members of the teaching staff being even members of the Senate.

Their reasons have still more weight when applied to membership of the Senate Finance Committee.