

Historian's Report: The Di Senate and Phi Assembly During World War II

Part One

This report covers the activities of the Societies during the period of September 1938 to November 1941. The information was derived from debates conducted by the Societies, as well as any other pertinent discussion gathered entirely from the minutes of both Societies. The purpose of this report is to discover the attitudes of the Societies toward the conflict in Europe and Asia, what they believed should be done, and how those beliefs compare with what actually happened.

By September of 1938, Hitler had been demanding for several months the highly-German populated area of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland. The Di Senate's first bill of the 1938 fall semester was, Resolved: "that the Dialectic Senate go on record as approving the annexation of the Czechoslovakian Sudeten German area by Germany." This bill was narrowly defeated by a vote of 6-8. The following week, the Senate debated whether the Czechs should accede to Hitler's demands in the interests of Western peace. This was more soundly defeated, by a vote of 3-10. The Phi Assembly debated the same resolution that same night, and defeated it 8-25. In early October, the Senate debated the efficacy of Neville Chamberlain's policies--the man behind the appeasement ideas towards Hitler. A bill approving his policies was defeated 8-19. Clearly, from these resolutions, both Societies became increasingly convinced that appeasement was not the correct policy. However, as future arguments show, few were in favor of a war to stop Hitler.

To give an indication of where the Societies stood on the political spectrum, it is helpful to bring in some other issues debated by the Societies. The Phi, for instance, voted overwhelmingly (63-5) that birth control information should be given out to students. As this was 1938, I consider this a rather left-ward leaning stance on the part of the Phi. The Di, in December of 1938, voted to approve a resolution denouncing Germany's persecution of the Jews. However, not too many months later, a debate arose over whether "Negroes" should be admitted to the university. Though there were some progressive comments, a more typical response was more like the following, colorful remark (this is favor of admitting African Americans): "(Why not?) After all, poor white trash smell as bad as Negroes." The resolution failed. A similar resolution in the Phi in January likewise failed. Though the Societies might have been able to see the plight of the Jews in Germany, many were unsympathetic to the plight of African-Americans in their own country.

The Phi, in early 1939, shows indications of their resolve to prepare for war, while not actually encouraging it. In January, they approved bills favoring Roosevelt's re-armament plan, and favoring the economic and propaganda techniques to stop the spread of Fascism. On February 21st, they voted that the U. S. should supply arms only to democratic countries, though by a close vote of 10-9. In September, the Phi approved the President's Cash-and-Carry policy. An overall sentiment that we shouldn't get involved was expressed by the 36-7 defeat that the President should mediate a peace settlement.

This preparation for war apparently did not extend to the forming of official alliances with democratic countries. On March 28, 1939, the Phi defeated a bill stating that the U.S. should pledge support to Great Britain and France. In February 1940, a bill favoring extending material aid to France was rejected. In May, a bill favoring giving all necessary material aid to the Allies was also rejected. In April, and again in October, the Di Senate defeated two similar bills proposing alliances with Great Britain and France. The October vote, it must be pointed out, was already after Germany had invaded in the West. In January of 1941, a motion favoring all possible aid to Great Britain was discussed and then withdrawn. A similar bill in February, specifically mentioning the Lend-Lease Act tied 13-13, with no tie-breaker recorded.

On the home front, a number of interesting bills came to the floors of the Senate and the Assembly. In November 1939, the Phi voted 22-8 that UNC should offer courses in military training and aviation. In January, the Phi voted against forming a UNC Committee for Un-American Activities. In early 1941, both the Di and Phi defeated similar bills allowing the government to use force against workers in the defense industry who went on strike. Both Societies voted on similar measures to strengthen ties to South American countries. This was a common view of conservatives and isolationists at this time--that the U.S. should stick to its own hemisphere. The Youth Peace Movement asked for the participation of the members of both Societies in an anti-war protest in April 1940. Many in the Di spoke against the rally, claiming that we need war to eliminate Fascism. In February 1941, the Phi voted that the Ludlow Amendment, whereby a declaration a war by the U.S. on another could only be made by a popular referendum, be rejected.

Late 1940 to mid-1941 saw a strengthening in both Societies of the commitment to go to war, or at least the acknowledgement that the war is inevitable. On October 22, 1940, the Assembly voted that the U.S. should suspend trade with Axis powers. A bill supporting the sending of humanitarian aid to occupied Europe failed over the question of whether or not the Germans would let any goods through to those who needed it. In January, 1941, the Phi thought that the provision of the Neutrality Act prohibiting loans to belligerent should be repealed, in order (presumably) to legally transfer aid to Great Britain. However, a resolution supporting the Lend-Lease Act was defeated in the Phi a month later. In April 1941, the Senate debated extensively over the question of what the U.S. should do with regard to the war. Some suggested giving as much aid as possible to Great Britain. Others thought that the war would come regardless of what the U.S. did. The most popular opinion seemed to be that if the U.S. stayed home, it would be safe. Coming just months before Pearl Harbor, this attitude is rather ironic. Many claimed that the U.S. has enough to do at home, without worrying about another foreign war. Some felt that the U.S. couldn't win a war it got into anyway. Many thought that Germany must be defeated quickly, and that the U.S. must stand up against the ideals of Germany. A vote on April 29 in favor of an immediate declaration of war against Germany was defeated. The Phi defeated a similar resolution that month.

In regard to the war in Asia, the Di Senate's first mention of it comes in 1938. In November, the Di argues for sanctions against Japan to stop its aggression in China, though no official vote was taken. In November 1940, the Di voted that the U.S. should place sanctions on Japan. This was at a time when the U.S. was still freely trading oil with her soon-to-be enemy. In May 1941, the Senate debated whether or not the U.S. should declare war on Japan. Many felt that more

sanctions were necessary and that, "we seem to be feeding the hog that is most likely to turn and bite us in the back." Others thought that it was necessary that the U.S. protect the Phillipines (still under U.S. control at the time). The vote was defeated unanimously, as most Senators felt that without direct interference, the U.S. has no reason to declare war. Again, with our knowledge of Pearl Harbor, we can appreciate the irony.

The Senate and Assembly mention the Soviet Union on only two occasions during this period. The first was in the Phi in May of 1941, where the Assembly resolved that it is in the U.S.S.R.'s best interest to remain neutral. Evidently Stalin's pact with Hitler was not the way to do it, as just two months later Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The Di's debate on October 27, 1941 was, Resolved, ; "That the U.S. should Declare War on Japan, If Japan Declares War on Russia." This was defeated by a vote of 5-20. Obviously, the Senate did not consider it in the U.S.'s interests to protect the U.S.S.R..

Part Two

From Pearl Harbor to the end of the war, relatively few records exist for either the Dialectic Senate or the Philanthropic Assembly. Conscription was obviously taking its toll on the membership of both societies, as more and more young men were drawn into service. The Phi actually ceased to exist from early 1943 until mid-1945. With the help of the Dialectic Senate and several other campus organizations, the Phi was re-assembled into a fully functioning Society. The Di had its own problems at this time, and either did not meet, or did not keep records, for the period of April 1943 until January 1945. These were difficult times for the Societies, and neither Society's membership ever rose to its pre-war levels.

Pear Harbor is never mentioned in the minutes of either Society, but the effects are evident in a new determination to win the war. Even before Pearl Harbor, The Phi Assembly seemed prepared for the inevitable. On November 11th, they voted 18-13 that the U.S. should go to war with Japan if Japan attacked any U.S. or British possessions in East Asia. The conservative notion of the U.S. keeping to its own hemisphere was gone by November 25th, when the Phi voted against a coalition of Western Hemisphere countries.

A number of interesting home-front and campus issues came to the floors of both the Senate and Assembly around this time. The President of the Senate had to break an 8-8 tie on the question of whether unrestricted criticism of the government should be allowed in times of war. The vote passed. The Phi did not pass a resolution that would have allowed college students to be deferred from the draft until after graduation. In late 1942, The Di rejected a vote on whether the poll tax should be abolished, but in early 1943, resolved that the voting age be lowered to 18 (it passed unanimously). The Senate was clearly in favor of anything that might hasten the war's end. In January 1945, they voted that all men 18-65 be required to move into war-essential industries. The Phi held a more conservative stance, voting that strikes in war industries be allowed, and that the government should not 'conscript wealth as well as manpower."

The idea of the second front was debated several times in the Societies. In January 1942, the Phi debated whether an Allied invasion of Europe was necessary in the immediate future. The vote was unanimously defeated. In May, the Di debated a similar bill, with the stipulation, "with the purpose of relieving the Russian front." Several Senators argued for the invasion, citing that the

Russian front was more important than India or even Australia. Others argued that the timing of the Invasion was just not right. The bill was defeated 10-14. The question of opening a second front in the West was also the subject of the inter-Society debate, held on November 10th, 1942. The Di Senate, speaking against the invasion, won.

With regard to the Vichy government in France, both Societies debated whether the U.S. should break off diplomatic relations with the collaborators. The Senate tabled their motion, while the Assembly voted to sever all ties.

An interesting meeting of the Di Senate was held on September 29th, 1942. the topic of discussion was, Resolved; "That Victory for Nazism Would Be the Destruction of American Culture." Paul Green gave a lecture on American ideals of art, beauty, and race. As Nazism's racial theories are the antithesis of American ideals, he argued that victory of Nazism would, in effect, be the destruction of U.S. culture. Bringing in ideas of aesthetics and art into a largely political debate was a very different kind of view-point, and this was, in any case, one of the few times the Societies looked at the ideologies facing each other in this conflict.

When it comes to ideologies, there are two votes taken by the Senate and Assembly that are very ambiguous as to their meaning. The first is by the Senate, which voted against restoring all the small countries of Europe as they were in 1935. Is this a vote for their incorporation into one of their larger neighbors, or even a tacit acceptance of the gains made by belligerent powers? Or is it an expression of concern over the correctness of the borders that people may have thought started the war? There are no details to indicate which of these views the Senate held. In the Phi Assembly, a vote was taken in 1942 that India should not be given its independence immediately. Is this a vote in the Colonial system, which by 1942 was clearly in its last stages? Or did members stress the "immediately" in the resolution, and argue that India was simply not ready for Independence? Again, in the face of inadequate information, it is impossible to say.

As mentioned before, both the Di and Phi either did not meet or did not keep records for much of 1943-1944. Thus, when the debates are resumed in 1945, post-war concerns were already the focus of debate. These debates ranged from what to do with Germany (such as whether or not all German males be required to spend a minimum of 7 years doing reconstruction work in Russia), to what the role of the U.S. should be (whether or not the U.S. should maintain a large military to ensure world peace). On August 8, 1945, just two days after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the Di Senate discussed the political implications of the atomic bomb "whose existence was announced this week." Connected to this were discussions later about the role of the U.N., what powers the member states should have, and what control the U.N. should have over nuclear weapons. The Societies evidently recognized the threat posed by the atomic bomb, by voting 8-1 that the U.N. should be given "direct, complete, and sole" control over such weapons.

In conclusion, the debates conducted by the societies from 1938-1945 provide a revealing record of what college students at this time thought about the world around them. Many showed traditionalist isolationist views by opposing any plans to prepare for war and opposing making alliances with anyone by countries in the Western Hemisphere. Others saw a bigger threat in Europe and Asia than another petty imperialist war. The Societies were almost always against

restrictions at home--those against criticizing the government of those banning workers in defense industries to go on strike. However, the Societies did not present themselves as being very progressive on one big social issue, that of allowing African-Americans into the university. Ten years before Brown vs. Board, the Societies were simply not ready for desegregation. The biggest impact of the war on the Societies was most obviously the drop in membership. From the disappearance of the Phi in 1943, to the dwindling of the Di to a mere 10 to 15 members, the Societies barely survived the crisis of the war. But survive it they did, as they weathered one of the most difficult times in their history.

Respectfully Submitted
Senator Max A. Spitzer, Di

**Historian's Report:
The Decline and Fall of the Dialectic Senate and Philanthropic Assembly
1956-1959**

Ever since the drastic decline in membership during the Second World War, the Di Senate and Phi Assembly had struggled to maintain themselves as individual societies. The period from 1956 until May of 1959 recounts the last years of the Societies as separate institutions. In 1959, a merger took place, whereby the Di Senate and the Phi Assembly joined to form the dialectic and Philanthropic Societies.

Beginning in 1956, each society contained about 15 active members. The Di recognized the problem of membership, and the membership committee chair cowed more fliers and publicity. The phi lacked quorum constantly during its last few years, and the Di was hampered by a slew of resignations and leaves of absence.

Both Societies, however, still commanded some attention, as evident from their lending out of portrait, furniture, and the Di and Phi halls to various groups. Inter-Society debates took place, and inter-Society rivalry was also still strong. In April 1956, the Di moved to refer to the Phi only as the "Corrupted Rib of the Senate," and later moved to make Elvis Presley a member of the phi. Various traditions were also maintained, i.e. the honorary vote for president given to James K. Polk, and allowed seniors unlimited speaking time in debates.

Guest speakers for inaugurations of new presidents came frequently until the last years, ranging from north Carolina Governors to Justices of the State Supreme Court. Debates at this time covered a wide range of topics, many of them political. There were debates on foreign policy and the presidential election of 1956, arguments over whether the Democratic party of the Republican party is better, as well as segregation, NC agricultural policies, and the place of women in society. Most debates were hotly contested, and about the only thing members agreed on was that Vice President Nixon was an incompetent pretty boy.

Once again, reading the minutes of the Societies caused me to wonder about passing judgments on the ethics of previous generations. The debates over segregation and race at this time are

numerous and vociferous. For the most part, the debate is even-sided, but occasionally Senators are recorded as having made some pretty harsh remarks. Senator Lambeth, in 1956, came into the chambers carrying a sign marked "KKK," he was asked to remove it. Senator Shaw, during the same meeting, argued that segregation was necessary to 'preserve the purity of Anglo-Saxon blood." In February 1957, discussion over the Negro question" in the Phi was postponed indefinitely. The debate picks up in October, with the following Executive session minutes recorded: [minutes attached]. To what extent should we fault these people for their racist viewpoints? Who among us can say, without any doubt that they should have acted better? Perhaps, I will simply let the record speak for itself.

We begin to see the Societies decline in a number of ways. First of all, there is a steady decline in the quality of inauguration speakers, The Societies went from having governors, to state representatives, to chancellors, to professors. On January 8, 1957, Dr. Poteat gave a speech in which he noted that he had been called the night before to come and speak on anything he wanted. The Di even went so far as to ask a prominent ex-Phi to come and speak.

Secondly, the number of guests who attended meetings steadily declined to one or two per meeting. Thirdly, the activities of the Societies in the UNC community slowly declined. The annual Di-Phi Awards, given to prominent students and faculty, was gone by 1959. The annual Inter-Society debate was changed to a Di-Phi versus Debate Club debate, and finally dropped altogether. Eventually, rather than having the Di and Phi recruit members from the Debate Squad, Debate Squad members were attending Di and Phi meetings encouraging people to try out for their team.

Fourthly, respect for the Societies and for other members began to break down. Numerous Critic's reports and comments made in Executive Sessions attested to the lack of decorum present during the meetings. The Critic of the Phi, in December 1958, commented that that night he had seen the worst speeches ever given in the Assembly. One clerk of the Di, Senator Moss, kept increasingly sarcastic minutes, criticizing people's speeches, and often lapsing into bitter personal attacks. Though most likely humorous in intent, actions such as these show little respect for the traditions of the societies. The Phi clerks show a similar lack of respect in their keeping of the minutes. The Phi minutes go from neatly hand-written pages in large ornate books, to hastily scribbled notes written on the backs of old financial reports.

Finally, there is the matter of finances. In December 1956, the Di reports that finances would be in order if everyone just paid their dues. The Phi reported in October that : "Finances not so good." They improved in 1956 from being \$30 in debt, to being only \$15 in debt. Outstanding debts to the *Yacket-Yack* seem to have been a major problem, and as one Phi noted: 'It is customary to pay our bills to the *Yack* a year late." When the Societies merged, the collective debt was reported as being only \$7.

Numerous stop-gap solutions and comments by concerned Senators do not seem to have influenced the steady decline in membership. Reports in executive session for both Societies acknowledged the problem, but little seemed to be done. Several members commented that the Societies should have more debates and fewer executive sessions. The Di, in December 1956, cancelled one meeting for the sole purpose of allowing members to spend that night searching

for guests to bring to the next meeting. The Phi tried to impose a 10 cent fine on anyone who didn't bring a guest to the meetings, but the bill failed. The inauguration of the president of the Di in 1956 stressed the duty of all Senators to bring in new members. Various guest speakers familiar with the Societies offered hope by saying the best was yet to come. Chancellor House, in an address to the Phi in 1956, claimed that they were at "the renaissance of the literary society ideal." However, both societies continued their downward trend. In one meeting in 1959, four Phi Assembly representatives engaged in a heated debate, with the president forced to break a 2-2 tie. The Di appears to have broken down sooner; enclosed is a photocopy of the last page of the final recorded minutes of the Dialectic Senate: [minutes attached].

The Di Senate minutes end in late 1957, so only in the Phi records can we investigate the final days of the Societies as independent entities. On March 31st 1959, there was discussion regarding handing over "operational authority" of the phi Chambers to the Student union. The next meeting was scheduled to be held at the "rat" on Franklin Street. May 12th was the last recorded minutes of the Phi Assembly. It is noted that three members of the Dialectic Senate were present to present a bill that would join the two Societies. Meetings were agreed to be conducted in the Dialectic Chambers, while using the Philanthropic Constitution for proceedings. Representative Black urged the combination, noting that the chambers would be taken away if nothing was done. Representative Jackson felt that the merger would not change anything. Representative Mathews wanted to see how "rush" went in the fall, and then make a decision. Before the 1:19 am adjournment, the Phi voted to merge with the Di. The Dialectic Senate and Phi Assembly had ceased to exist-- in their place, the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies.

Di-Phi met regularly in a Joint Senate beginning fall semester 1959. As the first page of the minutes states, they would meet as such, 'until such time that the growth in membership shall require a division into the component Societies.' In the first year of the joint Senate, membership was only up to about 15 total members. Debates continued as before, similar in organization to those of the Phi Assembly the previous semester. There were hopeful signs that the new arrangement would work out.

In 1960, Di-Phi was invited to furnish judges for the local high school debates.

In March 1960, the Governor of North Carolina (A Di Alumnus) accepted an invitation to make an address at the Societies. He was introduced by Chancellor House, and a commissioned portrait of Gov. Hodges was given to the Societies. Though not quite up to the standards of its distinguished pasts, the Di and Phi Societies had survived, re-born in the Joint Senate which continues to this day.

Respectfully Submitted
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