

Statement re National Hearings Committee Decision  
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I am as astonished by the recent actions of the National Hearings Committee as you are. I believe that they have far exceeded their authority. In removing the majority of the AMC, American Mensa's board of directors, they have done incalculable damage to the organization. On one point, Lori Norris and I agree: this is unprecedented. Their actions amount to a coup, leaving a minority of the AMC, including the Chair, to run American Mensa without any opposition.

I am bound by our very broad confidentiality policy which limits what I can say. In particular, there is complete secrecy surrounding the hearings. I've heard claims that this is to protect both Complainant(s) and Respondent(s). That's a fiction. My colleagues and I have been defamed and our reputations defiled. We are unable to rebut the many rumors which have circulated, some more fanciful than others, virtually all inaccurate. The extreme confidentiality allows the perpetrators of this coup to hide their identities, while offering no protection to those, like me, who can only offer assurances that we did nothing wrong.

This was not always the case. Past hearings have been open to the membership and were criticized for showing bias and for misconduct. The hearings I observed showed flaws. In particular, it appeared to me that the desired outcome was decided before the hearing and the decision was merely a rationalization of that outcome. The response by the AMC was not to improve the hearing process, but to add layers of secrecy.

To come to the conclusion that they arrived at, the Hearings Committee had to create from whole cloth a new category of Act Inimical: violation of the Bylaws. Nothing in the AML Bylaws suggests that interpreting the Bylaws is part of the Hearings Committee charge. Nothing in the ASIE defining the Hearing Process comes close to suggesting that this is within their authority. The Hearings Committee had to ignore the requirements of Robert's Rules of Order, which say that the governing body, the AMC, interprets the Bylaws. The Hearings Committee had to ignore that the AMC, as directed by Robert's Rules and our Bylaws, is based on majority, not minority rule, deciding that the vote of the majority was irrelevant. The Hearings Committee had to ignore the explicit provisions of the AML Bylaws which describe how members of the AMC may be removed from office. And, for good measure, they had to elevate their contrived reading of the ASIE to override its clear conflict with the Bylaws.

Finally, the Hearings Committee had to ignore that no action was taken by the AMC during the September 21 Executive Session other than the announced appointments. The Hearings Committee convicted the ten of us for something which simply did not happen.

The American Mensa Bylaws are inconsistent and there are many places where there are clear conflicts between the Bylaws, the ASIEs, Robert's Rules of Order, and our past practices. I and others have raised these concerns on multiple occasions, but have gotten little response from AMC leadership. There are times when people with good will can disagree on the interpretation and intent of the Bylaws. Robert's Rules says that the AMC, as American Mensa's governing body, determines how to interpret the Bylaws. Robert's also says that a majority vote makes this determination. The Hearings Committee, without any authority, has elevated their opinion about how to interpret the Bylaws over the majority vote of the AMC. The Hearings Committee has abused their power to elevate a disagreement about how to follow an ill-defined section of the Bylaws into one where they remove the AMC members who disagree with them.

Before I ran for RVC, I made my opinion about American Mensa well known. I saw it as badly managed and lacking in leadership. Quality of service and value to the membership was poor. The major accomplishments of the previous AMC term were the largest increase in dues, both in percentage and dollar amount, in American Mensa history; the largest decline in membership in American Mensa history; and the most resignations of AMC officers, elected or appointed, in American Mensa history. I ran for RVC, after talking with a few other candidates, with the hope that we could turn American Mensa from being ineffective, inefficient, and unresponsive to a more vibrant and responsive organization. Sadly, nothing in my experience as an RVC has changed my view of American Mensa as a failing organization.

I discovered that there were others who wanted to make American Mensa better, to improve how it operates, to communicate with members more honestly and openly, and provide better support for volunteers. In short, we wanted to “do things.” Let’s call us the *Doers*. We didn’t have a grand plan; we wanted to fix problems as we found them, trying new solutions based on our experience of Mensa. I found that there were others on the AMC who were opposed to doing anything differently from what had been done in the past. Let’s call them the *Don’ters*. You can figure who is who by looking at the voting record for any AMC meeting. While the *Doers* may not have a grand plan, I can’t tell what plan the *Don’ters* have other than simply to oppose every suggestion or proposal that is made.

Before I became an RVC, I felt that the relationship between myself as a Local Group officer and American Mensa (both the AMC and National Office) was anything but supportive. Frequently, communication from the AMC or National Office ranged from condescension and disregard to lies and bullying. Past AMC members described the toxic environment of the AMC to me (while not telling me the details). As a new AMC member, I discovered that my position as RVC did not entitle me to any better treatment. Issues I wished to discuss were ignored and motions which I (and other *Doers*) proposed were uniformly opposed by the *Don’ters*. I’ll mention a few: the motion to restore the Local Group stipend as an ASIE; the creation of a Technology Committee to attempt to address the sorry state of AML technology; and most recently the motion to establish a Confidentiality Policy, improving transparency.

Now that the hearing is no longer a secret, I can answer some of the questions which have been raised in the past month. I would have greatly preferred to be more open but I can only refer to matters which are public.

When we were notified about the hearing (the details of which I am prohibited from revealing) I felt stunned and outraged. Every communication I received persuaded me that there was no possibility of a fair and impartial hearing, that the people on the tribunal would be biased, and, like the past hearings I was acquainted with, it would be a sham. There followed the drumbeat of people who appeared to be informed about the hearing who used rumor and innuendo to paint the (then unnamed) *Doers* as miscreants. Chair Lori Norris used the same techniques. Our draconian confidentiality rules prevented me or the other *Doers* from responding to correct lies and distortions. If it appeared that we were being sneaky, it was simply that these confidentiality rules required us to act this way; not that we wanted to.

We attempted to get the AMC to waive confidentiality for the meetings and discussions which were relevant so that we could clear our good name. The Chair ruled this out of order. We looked at the Hearings Committee rules and found the way that they could avoid any checks and balances. Or indeed, without having to provide the review process which the Mensa Constitution requires. A motion was submitted which would have, as recommended by Robert’s Rules of Order, made every secret decision by the Hearings Committee subject to AMC review. The Chair ruled that this motion was out of order because it changed the Bylaws (which it didn’t), that it violated the Mensa

Constitution (which, in fact, it supported), and that we needed to get the Hearings Committee approval (which is not how motions to change ASIEs work). I'll note that the Chair didn't ask the Hearings Committee Chair to submit their newly crafted classes of Acts Inimical to be incorporated into the Hearing Process. Was this motion designed to protect us from a secret tribunal, acting without review, which we believed to be biased? Sure. Was it good policy to have every decision by a separate hearing reviewed by the governing body? Robert's Rules says it is. Was it protection from a rogue committee, acting outside of the bounds defined in the Bylaws and ASIEs, from making a ruling which amounts to a coup, removing the majority of the AMC from office? Damn right. Chair Lori Norris managed to prevent any discussion of the motion by the AMC. The suggestion that I have heard some people make that Norris was not coordinating with the Hearings Committee in this coup does not seem to me to be credible.

At the same time, Secretary Lefevre drafted a motion to make it a conflict of interest for AMC members to vote on any matter which affects them. This was gamesmanship; if the motion requiring AMC review of Hearings Committee decisions passed, or the Hearings Committee recommended a reviewable sanction, she wanted to make sure that only the *Don'ters* would be able to vote, ensuring the success of the coup. Perhaps she had read Robert's Rules of Order which has a caution about exactly this scenario, that the minority introduces charges against the majority, and blocks them from voting in their own defense.

The Hearings Committee has without question, done material harm to American Mensa, its members, and to its reputation. They may have created a situation where it is impossible for the AMC to meet because it lacks a quorum. A quorum is needed to conduct any business, including the rush to appoint Regional Coordinators. I expect that Chair Norris will violate the Bylaws and Robert's Rules of Order and conduct AMC meetings without a quorum, knowing that this violation will not result in any action by the Hearings Committee. The Hearings Committee, aided by Chair Norris, may have created a significant financial and legal liability for American Mensa.

Where are we now: The Hearings Committee has taken the outrageous and extreme action, without required review, of removing the majority of the AMC, and restricting us from any leadership role in American Mensa. I've served as LocSec for many years, as Editor, RG Chair and more. I've mentored volunteers in SFRM and over the past half year as RVC, supported other groups in Region 8. The other sanctioned RVCs and appointed officers have similar records of volunteering and mentoring in their areas. We are not the docile and compliant audience that the leadership wants on the AMC. We are, or should be, setting the course for a more vibrant and growing American Mensa. As a result of this coup, the Hearings Committee has endorsed the failures represented by Chair Lori Norris and her small troop of *Don'ters*. We *Doers* will be searching for ways to reverse this miscarriage of justice, but it is up to the American Mensa membership to take action to support our efforts.