

Good evening.

My name is Peter Ross and I'm on the slate tonight for Secretary-Treasurer. I can't be here in person, so Yinna has kindly agreed to read a statement from me to you. I think she'll probably do it better than I would, so please give her an ear?

When the administration took steps to withdraw all support from the alumni association last year, it knew precisely what it was doing. "Why should I pay even a single dollar to support an organization that's hostile to me?" This was President Bharucha's response when we questioned his purpose after lines of communications had been reopened in November.

A college president has no right to decide unilaterally to eliminate an alumni association, regardless of circumstances, and these circumstances were hardly as clearcut as President Bharucha would represent them to be. The hostility he sensed all around him never came directly from the alumni association. We never voted to support the lawsuit. We never occupied his office. We never called for his ouster. It came from all points of the compass. The CUAA was just a convenient target.

We've had discussions, called "negotiations," conducted since November by John Leeper and myself, together with the Administration and a concerned pair of trustees. They've been successful in exactly three ways. They permitted us to demonstrate to these trustees that the CUAA can be trusted to act as a responsible and *not* as a hostile member of the Cooper community. They permitted us to reveal to these trustees the President's instinctively divisive methods in dealing with various members of the Cooper community. And as these first two things became more and more clear, they permitted us to further drive a wedge between the Administration and many members of the Board of Trustees.

They have *failed* to convince the President, however, that the alumni association should be welcomed back into the fold of his Administration. In the President's words: "Let's see how you behave yourselves for awhile, and then we'll see whether

you can be trusted.” What? To stay up ’til eleven? To stay home alone when mommy and daddy are out? To drive the car? This particular proposition was insulting.

Things are not good. As CUAA liaison to the Art School faculty these last several years, I’m acquainted with the sense of 2nd class citizenship this administration has instilled there. As an observer of the way that the engineering faculty has responded to the administration’s recent tenure-track decision-making, I’m acquainted with the sense of dissatisfaction growing there. As someone who can do the admissions arithmetic, I’m acquainted with the Architecture School’s current fragility. Even if the big tuition decision is supposedly made and everyone should be expected to pull together again now, it’s not happening, and things are not good.

In the recent trustee meeting, the Board was asked to vote on whether it wanted to pursue negotiations with the New York State Attorney General’s office — which meant being willing to find a new President for July 2016. The alternative was to roll the dice in court. One trustee present at that meeting has been fond of putting it something like this: The alumni don’t want the president. The students don’t want the president. The faculties don’t want the president. So we have a choice. We can tell him he must go. Or we can find new alumni, new students and new faculties. Now, this is a clever, over-the-top construction, but not so over-the-top that it can be ignored. Things are still not good.

Here’s what the CUAA needs to do next, then:

**First: Every single vote on our Board of Trustees counts.** We need to insist that any candidate for CUAA President and Alumni Trustee is someone who is non-inflammatory and *assured of being seated by the Board of Trustees*. We need to insist that they pledge to abide by the decorum and rules that will afford us our say in that arena. The recent vote to negotiate with the AG’s office and, as a part of that, to be willing to terminate the president’s contract in June 2016, was passed 13-to-6 by my best estimate. Now, that’s a substantial majority. But if the vote were to be taken on *only* the question of the president’s continued service, it could be closer. Much

as I respect the President and admire his courage, I believe it is indisputably in the school's best interest to persuade him to step down right now, and every vote is going to count if it should come to that.

**Second: We must lead from the middle.** The tuition question is far from a decided issue. All that we have at the moment is a Board of Trustee vote to implement it at the present time, and a lawsuit hanging over everyone's head. So far as I know, it may still come to a roll of the dice, if only because the Committee to Save Cooper Union may decide that *it* wishes to roll them. If the future is unknown, one future could very well include my own personal desire, which is to see the entire Cooper community come respectfully together over the desire to find a way to reinherit our inheritance and reinstall the tuition-free policy of the past. In order to prepare ourselves to be an actor on that stage — and to make ourselves a *powerful* actor on that stage — the CUAA must lead from the middle. We have to work successfully with all parties. We have to do the tedious work to make allies among students, faculty, trustees and administration, to run events, to help the school fundraise, to grow our list of alumni addresses, and to convince the alumni out there that we take the long view and that we're genuinely dedicated to the school. We must be worthy of that long view by being true to it. Most of all, we have to demonstrate that we're not interested in a *fight* with anyone. Especially not simply because we like to fight. Myself, I've always liked a good fight. This, however, is *precisely* the wrong moment for one.

**Third and last: We need to come together ourselves and strengthen the alumni association. Step number one is: We need to vote and vote conscientiously in this election.** The larger the electorate, the more truly we represent the alumni. The more truly we do that, the stronger our voice when the big issues come — and they'll come soon. When John Leeper looked toward these elections, he said he wanted a “contested” election. More people than positions was basically his idea. Not another “Kremlin” model of backroom appointments. If it means that nights like tonight actually garner widespread interest from our alumni, that's a perfect reason all by itself. Contested elections involve agreement and disagreement, alliances and disputes, they involve politics.

I've already endorsed Nils Anderson for CUAA President and John Leeper for Alumni Trustee. But Nils told me this afternoon that he was approached by Sean Cusack to run on a "ticket," together with Kelly Smolar. Nils wondered how I felt about that. I think I *like* it. They share an approach. It looks like "coming together" to me. These are three good people who largely share my own idea of where the CUAA should be going and what kind of route it should take to get there. If it happens that Mr. Cusack is also running for the Secretary-Treasurer position that I'm also up for, I find that incidental. I support these three candidates, and in no way do I oppose their ticket. Vote for me, or vote for Sean, but above all vote for Nils Anderson and John Leeper.

*And then* I urge every voter to hold everyone elected to the course I've outlined:

- One: Make our votes count on the Board of Trustees.
- Two: Make certain that we lead from the middle, gracefully and effectively, with *no* gratuitous aggression, and
- Three: Cause the alumni association to come together so that it holds a position of respected authority in the Cooper community.

I have two more years on my term as a Council member. It's been a pleasure to serve this past year, and one way or another I expect to continue to serve profitably during the remainder of my time.

Thank you for listening, and good night.

Peter Ross

April 14, 2015