

AFL-CIO

HOW TO RUN A **UNION** MEETING



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Introduction

The practice and spirit of democracy in the union movement depends, at least in part, on the knowledge, imagination and hard work of local union leaders in making union meetings a democratic and educational experience for each member. We must constantly work to make our union meetings valuable and interesting for our members.

This handbook is designed to help local leaders obtain a knowledge of democratic meeting procedures and to suggest ideas for increasing membership interest, participation and attendance at meetings.

The major portion of this handbook is devoted to the duties of local union officers and the rules of parliamentary procedure. It is designed to help union officers get the business of the meeting taken care of in an orderly, efficient manner, and at the same time protect the rights of all members.

Not all union members come to union meetings even when they are well run, but there are other ways to reach union members. Over the years, delegates from international unions and state and local central bodies have discussed roadblocks to reaching union members at union conferences sponsored by the AFL-CIO Department of Education. This handbook outlines some of the suggestions made for overcoming these roadblocks.

If we can better reach our local union members and inspire them to become more involved in our fight to bring a voice to workers in every workplace, we will not only reap the benefits in our own movement, we will also increase the knowledge of democratic participation that our members and leaders will carry over into other organizations in the community to which they belong.

John J. Sweeney
President

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Checklist for Union Meetings

1. Has an agenda been planned?
2. Have the officers been contacted and the membership been properly notified about the meeting?
3. Are the minutes of the previous meeting ready for presentation?
4. Is the correspondence ready for presentation?
5. Are committees prepared to report? (Do they know when and how much time they have been given to report?)
6. Has the appropriate committee prepared the meeting hall? (Check flag, heat, lights, ventilation, chairs, rest rooms, etc.)
7. Is all special equipment ready to use? (Flip charts and easels, projectors, TVs and VCRs, microphones, etc.)
8. Are program arrangements complete? (Have education videos or leaflets arrived?)
9. Are materials ready for distribution? (Agenda, financial reports, minutes of the last meeting, committee reports, newspapers, leaflets or handbills.)
10. Have arrangements been made for guest or special speakers? (Do they know when and where the meeting is being held? Do they know what you expect them to do?)

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An Index to Motions

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Rules at a Glance

The chart beginning on the next page is a quick reference guide for a chair who is conducting a meeting. It contains a list of the motions most often used at a union meeting.

The motions are listed in order of priority. Thus, with a few exceptions, a motion on the list is in order even if one below it is pending. When any motion is made, those below it are out of order.

There are three groups of motions other than main motions:

- 1. Privileged motions** have a very high priority. They have no relation to the pending question, but are so urgent they take priority over all other motions.
- 2. Incidental motions or points of order** are motions that arise out of main motions or other pending questions and must be decided before the pending question, or before other business is taken up.
- 3. Subsidiary motions** are motions to dispose of, or change, a main motion or certain other motions.

Although no simplified chart can enumerate all the very fine points of the rules, this one can be helpful in most situations.

RULES AT A GLANCE

Motion	Debatable	Amendable	Requires a Second	Vote Required
Time for Next Meeting <i>(when privileged)</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Adjourn	No	No	Yes	Majority
Recess	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Question of Privilege <i>(Treat as Main Motion)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Point of Order	No	No	No	None unless appealed; then Majority
Appeal	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Objection to Consideration of Question	No	No	No	Two-thirds
Withdrawal of Motion	No	No	No	Majority
Suspension of Rules	No	No	Yes	Two-thirds
Lay on the Table	No	No	Yes	Majority
Previous Question <i>(close debate)</i>	No	No	Yes	Two-thirds or Majority
Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	No	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds or Majority
Postpone to a Definite Time	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer or Commit	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Postpone Indefinitely	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Main Motion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Motion to Reconsider*	Yes, if motion to which it applies is debatable	No	Yes	Majority
Motion to Rescind*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds of members present; Majority when Notice to Rescind given at previous meeting

* These are treated as Main Motions.

In Order When Another Is Speaking	Can Be Reconsidered	Motions to Which It Applies	Motions That Apply to It
No	No	None	Amend
No	No	None	None
No	No	None	None
Yes	Yes	None	All
Yes	No	Any motion or act	None
Yes	Yes	Any decision of the chair	Lay on Table; Close Debate; Reconsider
Yes	Yes	Main Motion; any Question of Privilege	Reconsider
No	Yes	Any motion	None
No	No	Any motion where needed	None
No	No	Main Motion; Appeal; Question of Privilege; Reconsider	None
No	Yes	Any debatable motion	Reconsider
No	Yes	Any debatable motion	Reconsider
No	Yes	Main Motion; Question of Privilege	Amend; Reconsider; Limit or Close Debate
No	Yes	Main Motion; Question of Privilege	Amend; Reconsider; Limit or Close Debate
No	Yes	Main Motion; Limit Debate; Refer; Postpone; Fix Time of Next Meeting	Amend; Reconsider; Close Debate
No	Yes	Main Motion; Question of Privilege	Reconsider; Limit or Close Debate
No	Yes	None	All
Yes	No	Any motion except Adjourn, Suspend Rules, Lay on Table	Limit Debate; Lay on Table; Postpone Indefinitely
No	Yes	Main Motion; Appeal; Question of Privilege	All

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Why Parliamentary Law?

It has been said many times that democracy begins in the union meeting.

To a member, the measurement of democracy in the union often is just that—what goes on at the union meeting. Do I know how to get up and say what I think? Is the meeting dominated by a small bunch of long-winded characters? Do we get things done at the meeting? Is it just a clique that's running things? These questions often are the yardsticks a member uses to measure the union. To ensure democracy and prevent members from milling around in confusion when they come together, a set of rules for meetings has been developed over the years.

WHERE THE RULES CAME FROM

Because these rules were originally based on the experiences of the British Parliament, they are known as parliamentary law, or parliamentary procedure.

Thomas Jefferson wrote the first manual of procedure for Congress. The book most often used today adapts the rules of Congress for action by deliberative bodies: Robert's Rules of Order.

Most unions have modified Robert's rules to suit their own purposes. Others have provided their rules for conducting meetings in their constitution or bylaws.

In his manual, Jefferson said it is not so important what the rule is, but that there be a rule to guide us.

Rules for meetings enable the work of the union to get done effectively and efficiently while protecting the rights of all members. Just as learning to play a game properly requires a knowledge of the rules, playing a proper role in the union requires a working knowledge of the rules for union meetings.

When only the chair knows the rules, the work of the meeting suffers. When most of the body has a working knowledge of the rules, the members actually control the meeting, and the chair simply directs it.

However, a member does not need to memorize the rules in order to participate in a union meeting. No one can know everything about parliamentary procedure. At times, even the best parliamentarian has to rely on good judgment and the common sense of the group. These rules are not carved in stone; start with the basic principles behind the rules, and when in doubt, look up a rule or ask questions.

The basic principles behind the rules can be stated as follows:

- ▶ Only one subject should come before the meeting at a time.
- ▶ Each proposal coming before the meeting shall be debated freely with meaningful discussion.
- ▶ The will of the majority is sought, but a minority or minorities may present a case.
- ▶ Each member has rights and responsibilities equal to those of every other member.
- ▶ The desires of the membership should move debate along so the welfare of the organization is served.

Nominations and Elections

Most AFL-CIO unions have rules in their constitutions that prescribe the qualifications of members to stand for office or as delegates to conventions. These rules should be followed carefully. The Landrum-Griffin Act prescribes minimum standards for union nominations and elections that must be followed for an election to be valid. To be sure they are following proper procedures, local unions should check with their national or international union.

Local union officers must be elected at least once every three years by secret ballot cast by members in good standing. Not less than 15 days before the date of the election, notice must be mailed to the home of each member. These procedures are required under the Landrum-Griffin Act. Although federal regulations permit uncontested elections without a secret ballot when certain conditions are met, it generally is advisable to use a secret ballot.

The act also requires that adequate safeguards be provided to ensure a fair election. Members must have a reasonable opportunity to nominate candidates. Voting must be by secret ballot in the election of local union officers and the election of delegates who will vote on national or international union officers. Ballots and all other records pertaining to the election must be preserved for at least one year after the election.

Nomination and election of union officers should not take place at the same meeting. Nominations of officers or convention delegates are usually a special order of business on the meeting agenda. When the time comes, the chair calls for nominations. They are made orally

from the floor as the chair recognizes each member seeking the privilege of placing a name before the membership.

Placing a member in nomination merely requires permission from the chair to rise and say, for example, "Mr. Chairman, I nominate Joe Duffy, second shift, Film Division." The secretary writes down the name of each nominee. No second is required.

As nominations are made, the chair should guard against members who would close nominations as soon as their favorite candidates have been nominated. The chair should rule out of order any motion to close nominations until adequate time has been allowed for every potential candidate to be nominated.

The motion to close nominations requires a second and a two-thirds vote to support it. This is an undebatable motion. The chair says, "The motion has been made and seconded that nominations be closed. All those in favor, say 'aye.' Opposed, 'no.' "

When nominations have been closed, the chair should ask the secretary to read the names of the candidates from the last nominated to the first. Each nominee should accept or decline at this time or indicate his or her decision in writing some time before the election date. If the nominee is not present, the secretary must notify him or her before election for a response.

Under the law, local union officers have the obligation to comply with the request of any candidate for union office to distribute at the candidate's expense campaign literature to all members in good standing. Local union officers cannot discriminate against any candidate's right to reach the membership or right to inspect membership lists at least once within the 30-day period before the election. Candidates also have a right by law to have an observer at the polls and present when the ballots are counted.

Local union officers can obtain additional information on election procedures from their international union.

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What Makes a Good Chairperson?

A good chairperson is made, not born.

But a good chairperson is not always the officer who has learned all the rules of order. This officer is likely to get entangled in too many details to be completely effective.

WHAT DOES THE CHAIR HAVE TO KNOW?

A good chair does need to know enough about the rules to meet the problems of procedure that may come up at the local meeting. In addition, the chair should be familiar with the union's constitution and bylaws. These include not only the local union rules, but also those of the national or international union that chartered the local. At times, the chair may have to rule on constitutional questions. Because infringements of the union's constitution are serious matters, a local may find itself in trouble if it violates the constitution, even inadvertently.

The chair also must understand the union's relationship to other such union organizations as the AFL-CIO and its state and local central labor bodies.

Finally, the chair must learn to be fair, impartial and courteous to everyone when chairing the meeting—much like a referee or an umpire.

WHAT DOES THE CHAIR DO?

It is up to the chair to:

- ▶ Keep the meeting moving;
- ▶ Help members know what is going on—which rules apply and why;

- ▶ Promote full discussion so that voting is informed; and
- ▶ Protect the minority.

It may look like a big job—and it is. But much of the skill required of the chair comes with practice. Nevertheless, here are a few tips on how to do the job and handle some of the situations that come up:

1. Keep the meeting moving. Get to know the membership. Keep an eye on those members who seem to attend so that they can test the rules of procedure or to talk to a captive audience. Don't let them tie up the meeting. Listen to all that is said and look out for abuses of the rules. A person who rises to a "point of order" is out of order if he or she uses it as an excuse to gain the floor to discuss the motion under consideration.

Always keep control of the debate on the subject. Politely bring speakers back to the subject of the motion when they wander off, even if it is necessary to interrupt them. (Everyone gets the idea after a while.) In addition, meeting time is too precious to allow for personal exchanges between speakers. "The chair must interrupt Brother Hardy and ask him to speak on the motion before the membership and address his remarks to the chair only" is the way to handle these exchanges. On the other hand, the chair can suggest motions to keep the meeting moving along, such as, "Do I hear a motion to adopt the report of the Legislative Committee?"

If you have a few people who want to talk on and on, learn how to tactfully cut them short. Sometimes even the chair must remember not to talk too much.

2. Help members know what is going on. Parliamentary rules can be very complicated to many members, especially during extended debate or when amendments come up. From time to time, repeat the question before the membership. If members seem confused about what they are going to vote on, repeat the motion. If it's an amendment, then make it clear what the amendment says and means. A good chair also can help a member who is having difficulty making a point. The chair can help word the motion or point out how the member may accomplish the purpose under the rules; for example,

“Sister Thomas is suggesting we set up our own local political action committee. It is out of order here. I suggest she put this in the form of a motion when we come to New Business, which is the next item on our agenda after we dispose of our committee reports.”

3. Promote full discussion so that voting is informed. Ask long-winded speakers to shorten their remarks; for example, “Brother Smith, you have already stated your main arguments on this motion, and the chair would like to request that you conclude your remarks to allow time for others to speak on the motion.” This example is in order if Brother Smith is, in fact, droning on and on. Note those who want to speak on a motion. Recognize the first person who asked for the floor, but indicate to the others who will be next. Always repeat the motion being voted on before a vote is actually taken.

4. Protect the minority. Be in a position to know who is for or against certain motions. Then give them the floor alternately. If you’re not sure, then it’s proper to say, “We have just heard someone for the motion. The chair will now recognize a speaker against the motion. Sister Jones, are you for or against?” Never let an unpopular or minority viewpoint be shouted down. Point out that they all can record their opinion when it comes to the vote, but that everyone has a right to share his or her views during the debate.

Frequently asked questions might arise on conflicts: (1) When might the chair step aside? and (2) Is the president always the best one to chair a meeting?

5. Introduce outside speakers. At times, the chair is called upon to introduce an outside speaker. This is not the occasion to make a speech. It is enough to give the name of the speaker, title and qualifications, the subject and to indicate the time that has been allocated for this part of the program. Better yet, have the appropriate committee chair make the introduction.

These are only a few of the situations a chair runs into. Thousands of local union members chair meetings across the country—not every one knows all the rules, faces the same situations or conducts a meet-

ing exactly the same way. But a good chair learns willingly and tries constantly to improve as a chair and as a leader.

The point of this chapter is summed up very well in the following statement from a handbook of rules published by a union in Canada:

“A democratically minded chairperson, well versed in the rules of order, tolerant, patient and impartial and, above all, possessing a liberal supply of good sense, is more of a safeguard for an orderly meeting than a library of parliamentary law...It is more important for a chairperson and the members of an organization to get the spirit of democratic procedure than to observe the letter of the law. The will for order may often obtain order and progress in a meeting even if errors are made in the use of rules. It is, however, best to be conversant with the rules in order that meetings may be orderly.”

**A good chair
learns willingly
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leader.**



The Recording Secretary

Secretaries usually perform three tasks: taking minutes of the meeting, preparing them for presentation and handling correspondence. The secretary also can be an important aid to the chair during the meeting by helping to follow the agenda and reading back the exact wording of motions when needed.

Endless reading of long, dull correspondence has deadened many a meeting. With a little practice, the secretary can learn to look over correspondence before the meeting and summarize, rather than read, the less important letters.

The minutes should include all the votes taken at a meeting and short summaries of all the reports submitted. They should be brief but accurate in wording. The words must describe the action clearly, but should not include the discussion nor reflect the personal opinion of the secretary or any other officer. They should be an impartial, accurate record of the action taken by the meeting.

No one expects a local union secretary to take shorthand or use speed writing; the experienced secretary takes rough notes of the action at a meeting and then summarizes and clarifies the notes for the record.

There is no set way of keeping minutes, but minutes of a regular local union meeting might appear as follows:

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 2, 2000

The meeting of Local 2 was called to order by President Schmidt at 8:15 p.m. All officers were present. *[If any officers were missing, they should be listed here.]* The minutes of the last meeting were distributed and accepted.

Report of the Treasurer

Bank balance on the 1st	\$400.00
Money received this month	\$380.00
Checks written this month	\$280.00
Balance	\$500.00

Report of Political Action Committee

Committee Chairman Baker reported efforts of committee on drive for \$2 voluntary contribution. Total contribution was \$95, with half the membership contributing. The committee hopes to increase participation next year. Report accepted. Motion by Brother C. Mack passed for vote of thanks to the committee for its efforts.

Because of one pressing communication, the regular order of business was suspended on a motion of Sister Miller that the time be spent to hear a report of new safety and health legislation passed while President Schmidt was in Washington for a national legislative conference.

Letter from international union urging help for Local 101, on strike for 10 weeks. Motion by Brother E. Jones passed to send to Local 101 \$50 to aid strikers.

New Business

Motion made that local subscribe to the AFL-CIO's *America@work* magazine. Amendment by Sister T. Smith adopted to make this a bulk order of 30 copies for distribution to all officers and members of legislative, education and negotiating committees. Move by Sister S. O'Connor to table motion until the recording secretary could write the AFL-CIO for rates on the bulk order. Passed.

Nominations for delegates to AFL-CIO state federation convention on September 16-17. Motion by Brother W. Dean to increase usual number of delegates to three this year. Motion lost. Brothers T. Jones and A. Hand and Sister M. Toole nominated. Voting result was Jones (36), Hand (46), Toole (50). Hand and Toole elected. Motion by Brother W. Dean to appoint T. Jones as alternate. Passed.

Meeting adjourns at 10:00 p.m.

(signed) Pat Marsh
Secretary

The Local Treasurer

One important part of this union office is reporting to the membership on the union's finances. It's important for union officers to remember that union money is the members' money—and the members deserve to know how every penny is spent. No union money should be spent in a way an officer wouldn't want the members to know about. Some international unions have guides for treasurers or financial secretaries.

The treasurer must make sure that as broad a range of members as possible see and understand the union's finances. Expenditures

**Members deserve
to know how every
penny is spent.**



should be read and approved at each meeting and a full financial statement presented to the membership at least once a year.

However, financial statements are not easy to understand and can be dry and boring. It is helpful to explain the complicated items to the membership. Members can understand better if they have a copy of the statement in front of them. Some locals distribute their yearly statement or print it in their local union paper. Short of these methods, writing it on a blackboard can help the membership understand the items being read off by the secretary. Some imaginative financial secretaries and local treasurers have used the presentation of the yearly financial report to plan a program with the Education Committee on "How Your Dues Were Spent This Year."

The treasurer is, of course, responsible for keeping accurate records of the local's finances and filing the requisite forms with the government. These records are required by the respective national and international unions, and also are required by the AFL-CIO for central labor bodies. *The procedures to follow often are different for different unions.* New financial secretaries can get help from the parent bodies in making sure they are following proper procedures and records.

Guarding the funds of a local is fundamental to good trade unionism. The financial officer and local's trustees are key.

Committees and Their Reports

It is impossible for a local to carry on all its work at the regular meetings. Preliminary planning and work must take place before each membership meeting. Problems may need action between meetings. Other concerns don't deserve the attention of the whole meeting. Effective committees ensure the work gets done outside of meetings.

In addition, the more people actively serving on committees, the stronger the local—a member taking part in a particular activity becomes more interested and invested in the union as a whole. Furthermore, with well-functioning committees, a local can accomplish more. The experience of many locals also shows that good committee reports and discussion on these reports can make the difference between a lively, interesting meeting and a dull, boring one.

TYPES OF COMMITTEES

Every local needs a number of committees. There are two types of committees: standing and special.

A standing committee is one that continues from year to year, although the committee members may change. Many unions provide in their constitutions or bylaws for certain standing committees. The most important standing committees are the Executive Committee or Executive Board and the shop stewards or delegates (or Shop Committee). The Executive Committee is responsible for local union decisions made between meetings. It helps to plan the local meetings and other union activities. Specific duties usually are listed in the local union's bylaws or international union's constitution. Other standing committees oversee such permanent activities as legislation and political events, safety and health, community services, etc.

A special committee is appointed by the president or elected by

the membership for a specific assignment; when that job is done, the committee ceases to exist. The local might establish a special committee to receive a guest or to plan a Labor Day event or a picnic. Or the chair may see that the membership needs information to act on a new proposal or idea and may suggest that a special committee be appointed to get the facts and report at the next meeting. Special committees should be dismissed with thanks.

COMMITTEES AT WORK

Usually when a committee has been selected, a chair will be named. The president or another officer, or the first member named, may act as chair; or, the committee may choose its chair from its members. A committee chair is responsible for steering the committee by ensuring it meets regularly, the members are notified of meetings and reports are made at the proper times and places.

Many unions place a member of the local executive board on each committee, and this person may serve as chair. The local union president commonly is an ex officio member of every committee.

Each committee also should select a secretary and, if it is a large committee, a vice chair.

One of the big advantages of committee action is its informality. In small groups, the rules of parliamentary procedure can be loosened. Members enjoy a meeting where they can easily take an active part. This informality encourages a committee to discuss a problem or suggestion thoroughly and reach a common agreement. However, the chair must keep the committee on track and not allow the meeting to become just a gripe session. Committees have responsibilities to the membership.

PREPARING AND PRESENTING COMMITTEE REPORTS

The report to the meeting should be as short and interesting as possible. Usually, the chair or a particularly interested member of the committee makes the report. A report on an extremely important issue or

one recommending action should be put into writing and distributed. Minutes of the Executive Committee usually are submitted as the report of that committee.

An outline of a committee's general report might include:

- ▶ Names of the members of the committee;
- ▶ Main activities of the committee (what the committee is doing);
- ▶ Problems and successes the committee is having and why; and
- ▶ Summary—specific action recommended or suggestions for what members can do.

To maintain member interest, try different ways of reporting. Put on a skit; ask different members of the committee to present various parts of the report; or draw up the report as an attractive handbill to be distributed at the meeting or passed out to the local's members.

ACTING ON COMMITTEE REPORTS

The members should have an opportunity to "accept" committee reports. Such acceptance is usually done by a vote. This signifies approval of the committee's report and also adopts its recommendations.

When the report of a committee includes several suggestions or recommendations for action, "acceptance" or "rejection" should be voted on one point at a time. This is especially true in cases of a constitution or bylaws committee.

Specific recommendations made by a committee may be amended by the membership before acceptance. Members might raise or lower the amount to be given for a contribution or change the date of a special event, etc.

MINORITY REPORTS

When the members of a committee cannot agree on a report, the minority may oppose adoption of the report by the membership or may submit a minority report to the membership. Ordinarily, the

meeting should hear the minority report; if there is any objection, the matter should be put to a vote without debate.

The membership acts on the report of the majority unless a motion is passed to substitute the minority report. If this happens, discussion proceeds on the minority report. If this motion to substitute is defeated, then the membership acts on the majority report.

BUILDING EFFECTIVE COMMITTEES

Committees are at the heart of every local union. They provide an effective way to involve members in the union, to tap their talents, energy and interest and to develop the leadership that unions always need. The following suggestions can help you get your committee off the ground:

1. Meet. Some committees are elected, some are appointed by the local union chief executive officer and some are volunteer committees. If there is no chair, the local president can appoint one temporarily to call the first meeting of the committee; at this time, the committee can select its own chair. The committee must meet right away to set a date, time and place for the first meeting.

2. Decide on goals. At the first meeting, get acquainted. Discuss the overall task of the committee. Come to some agreement about what the committee should do first. Don't tackle too big a job; better to succeed on a smaller task first and have a good feeling about what you accomplish.

3. Get everyone involved. Share the work. The chair must follow up to be sure assigned tasks get done.

4. Keep records. Appoint or get a volunteer to be the secretary of the committee. Be sure that a record is kept of every meeting, what was decided and who agreed to do what. It helps you check on work in progress and serves as a permanent record of the activities of the committee and how it functioned.

5. Report. Committees should report to the union membership on their work. Each committee will want and need support for its work, cooperation, funding and acceptance of recommendations it makes.

The union is entitled to a written report, which becomes part of the local's written record.

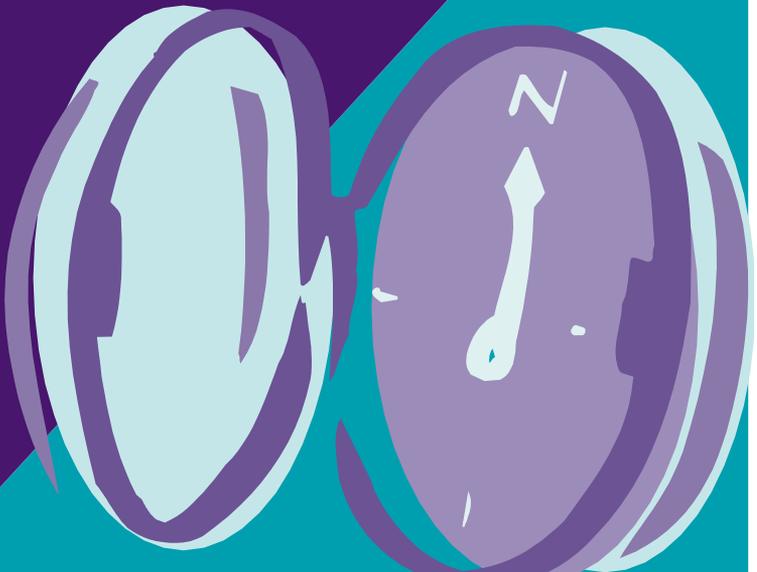
6. Give credit where credit is due. Acknowledge committee members' contributions to whatever project they work on.

7. Get membership action. Be prepared to answer questions from the membership and share this responsibility among committee members.

Remember that committees:

- ▶ must have real jobs to do;
- ▶ should tackle only one task at a time;
- ▶ should share the work;
- ▶ should follow up with each committee member; and
- ▶ ensure satisfaction with a job well done.

Committees are at
the heart of every
local union.



Basic Rules of Order— How Motions Get Action

The motion is the basis of all action at a membership meeting. A membership decision to take action on a problem is cast as a motion. It is the keystone of all rules of order.

Without a motion, no report can be dealt with, no new business can be introduced, no discussion closed, no meeting adjourned. Yet in spite of its importance, a motion is a simple thing. Complications arise from the way discussions are handled, the kinds of motions offered and the possibility of amendments and amendments to amendments.

MAKE THE MOTION

A member desiring to present a motion rises and addresses the chair as “Mr. Chairman” or “Madam Chair.” Anyone in the meeting can rise to talk, but no one has the right to talk until recognized by the chair and “given the floor.”

Ordinarily, the chair recognizes the first member to rise. When two or more rise at the same time, the chair must exercise judgment in making a choice. When a member has been given the floor, the rest of the group should sit and listen. The chair recognizes a member by nodding or pointing to the member, or by calling out his or her name or position in the hall: “Sister Smith,” or “The brother in the fourth row center.”

When Sister Smith is recognized by the chair, she offers a motion: “Mr. Chairman, I move that Local 2212....” She sits down. Another member rises to be recognized and seconds the motion. He does this simply by saying: “I second the motion, Mr. Chairman.”

In many union meetings, all that is required for a motion to be seconded is for a member to call out “Second” in a loud voice while remaining seated. No motion can be considered until it receives a second. Any proposal that cannot get a second is not worthy of discussion.

In some instances, a member desiring to make a motion will ask the privilege of explaining the purpose of his motion before making it. If there is no objection from the body, the chair may allow the member to do this.

STATE THE QUESTION

When the motion has been made and seconded, the chair should repeat it loudly and clearly, so that all members will know what action has been proposed. If the motion is poorly worded or confusing, the chair should reword the motion, politely, so that its meaning will be clear. If the chair thinks the motion is out of order, this should be pointed out as soon as it is made.

Instead of repeating or rewording the motion for the membership, the chair may ask the secretary to read it.

DISCUSS THE MOTION

When the chair has restated the motion, or has had it read, discussion is in order: “A motion has been made and seconded that Local 2212....Is there any discussion?”

The person proposing the motion usually is given the first opportunity to speak. The best arguments to support the motion are expected from the person who makes the motion. After this opening statement, members speak for or against the motion as they are recognized by the chair.

It is a good practice for the chair to alternate speakers for and against a motion. No one should speak twice on a motion so long as there are others desiring to speak. A member who seldom participates should be given preference over the one who speaks frequently.

The Chair May Speak

The chair may speak on a motion provided he or she leaves the "chair." No speech should be made from the chair. The chair should not dominate the meeting; the members then may hesitate to state their opinions. It is best that the chair speak only when the full meaning of the motion has not been brought out by discussion, or when the matter is so very important to the well-being of the local that everyone should know where the chair stands.

In such a situation, the chair should step down to talk to a motion, and another officer should take the gavel. The chair's remarks will be better received from the floor than from the chair.

The motion is the
basis of all action
at a membership
meeting.



AMEND OR SUBSTITUTE A MOTION

If debate becomes extensive, or the debate indicates the motion is unclear, the members probably will want to change the motion a little. That's when an amendment is used or a substitute motion is in order. Either may be offered at any time after a motion has been seconded and before the vote is taken.

The person wishing to move for an amendment to a motion gets the floor in the same manner as one speaking on the motion. The amendment must be seconded before it can be considered.

The amendment must be stated clearly and define the section of the motion affected. For example, someone may move that "the Executive Board investigate the possibility of the local sponsoring a Little League ball team." Another member may want to change this by saying "I propose an amendment changing the words 'the Executive Board' to 'a special committee.'" Ordinarily, amendments are made to change a motion or include more specific information.

No amendment can be offered that is directly contrary to the motion. For example, an amendment not to investigate the possibility of sponsoring the team would be out of order. The amendment also must be closely related to the subject of the motion. It cannot be used to introduce a new subject.

Once an amendment has been moved and seconded, discussion then follows on the amendment. In voting, the vote is taken first on the amendment and then on the main motion. The chair says: "All those in favor of the amendment that strikes out the words...and substitutes the words...please indicate by the usual sign." If the amendment is defeated, another amendment may be offered.

A substitute motion can replace the original motion and include changes or suggestions brought out in discussion or offered by amendments. It keeps the action simple and straightforward. Discussion and voting take place on the substitute motion. It too can be amended, just as if it were an original motion.

AMEND AN AMENDMENT OR SUBSTITUTE MOTION

Just as it is possible to change a motion, so it also is possible to change an amendment. A member may not be satisfied with the amendment and may attempt to improve it by moving an “amendment to the amendment.” In the example above, some members may feel that the committee should be elected, and so would move “an amendment to the amendment providing that the committee be elected.”

That is as far as the members can go, for there can be no amendment to an amendment to the amendment. When you have reached the point where an amendment is being offered to an amendment, a substitute motion may be preferable.

An amendment to an amendment is made in the same way as an amendment or a motion. It requires a second. When it is made, the discussion then must take place on the amendment to the amendment. The chair sometimes can ask the maker of the motion and the second whether they would be willing to accept the amendment as part of the original motion. If they agree and no other member objects, this can be done, saving time and energy.

Otherwise, the amendment to the amendment, the amendment and the motion must be debated and voted upon step by step in that order. And the chair must carry through each step until the main motion has been voted on. A favorable vote on an amendment or an amendment to the amendment does not carry the main motion with it. Members may favor an amendment as the least objectionable choice and still oppose the idea embodied in the main motion.

Although there can be an amendment to an amendment, there cannot be two separate amendments to a motion before the meeting at the same time.

VOTE

When it appears that no one else wants to discuss the motion or propose amendments, the chair asks, “Are you ready for the question?” If no one desires to speak, the vote is taken. But the chair must use

care not to cut off debate.

When the membership is ready to vote, the chair (or secretary) reads the motion again. For a simple voice vote, the chair then says, "All those in favor of this motion, say 'aye.'....Those opposed, 'no.' " If the response is favorable, the chair then says, "The ayes have it and it is so ordered."

The chair should always be sure to call for the "nays" as well as the "ayes," even though there seems to be a unanimous vote in favor.

VOTE BY SHOW OF HANDS

When there is any doubt on the part of the chair or the membership as to which side has prevailed, a vote by show of hands or a standing vote is in order. The chair may ask for such action.

Using a show of hands as the common measure will give a clear-cut division of the membership on all issues.

A member may call for a vote by a show of hands by simply calling out the word "Division" from his seat. The chair must grant this request at all times. If the group is a large one, the chair may appoint, or have available, a committee of tellers who will count hands for or against the move. Otherwise, the secretary and the chair do the counting. The actual count should be made unless the result is so obvious as to be without question.

VOTE BY BALLOT

On very important questions, such as elections, taking a strike vote or purchasing property, voting should be by ballot. This makes each vote a matter of record and preserves secrecy. Various bylaws may require that certain votes be by secret ballot. In other instances, a vote by ballot may be agreed to by general consent or by a motion from the floor. Such a motion is not debatable and requires a simple majority.



How Action Takes Place

We have discussed motions, amendments, discussion and voting. To illustrate all this, let's see a local membership take action on a problem that has been brought before the meeting.

We are under "New Business" in the agenda.

The chair asks: "Is there any new business?"

A sister in the third row is given the floor.

"Mr. Chairman, it seems to me, we have sent several delegates to union leadership training schools during the past several years, but I don't recall participating in any program led by those new leaders. I think if we are going to spend money to send..."

MAKE THE MOTION FIRST

The chair interrupts the sister by saying: "The chair appreciates your interest in leadership training. If you have any suggestions to make in the use of trained leaders, please put them in the form of a motion. Unless there is a motion on the floor, you cannot speak."

"OK, Mr. Chairman," says the sister. "I move that the president appoint an Education Committee from among the persons who have attended leadership training schools so that we can begin to realize..."

GET A SECOND

Again the chair interrupts. "Is there a second to this motion that I appoint an Education Committee from among those who attended leadership school?" Several voices speak up to second the motion.

"All right, sister, now you may speak on your motion."

"Well, as I was saying, it's a waste to send people off to leadership training schools and then let them get lost without any opportunity to serve on an Education Committee. All of us need more information to cope with the problems we are facing as citizens in our union and our nation. And I guess I could use a class on rules for union meetings by the way I'm conducting myself here tonight."

MAKE AN AMENDMENT

"Mr. Chairman," Sister Brown seeks the floor and is recognized. "Mr. Chairman, I agree with the sister from Department 6, that we should have an Education Committee, but I don't think we should limit Education Committee membership to those who have attended leadership training schools. I move we amend the motion so the president can appoint any interested person to the Education Committee."

The chair restates the proposed amendment and asks if there is a second. There is, and the chair asks if there is any discussion on the amendment.

TAKE ONE THING AT A TIME

"Mr. Chairman!"

"Yes, Brother Hernandez."

"Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of activities that we ought to start. I hear lots of good things about credit unions, and I'm sure a lot of fellows would join one..."

"Just a minute, Brother Hernandez, are you rising to talk on the amendment to the motion about setting up a local union Education Committee? If not, you are out of order, and I'll have to ask you to take your seat. Sister Martin, did you want to speak on the amendment?"

"Yes, Mr. Chairman, but I noticed that no one has said anything about the size of the committee, so I would like to offer an amendment that this committee should have seven members."

"Please, Sister Martin, only one amendment at a time. Your amendment is out of order. We are now discussing an amendment

that would permit the selection of any interested person to the Education Committee and not limit it just to people who have attended union schools. Your amendment will be in order after we have acted on this one."

The chair continues. "Is there any further discussion? Brother Henderson is recognized."

"Mr. Chairman, I think that the fact that a person attends a union school indicates that he has an interest in education. How better can we measure a person's interest?"

"Sister Humphrey?"

"Yes, Mr. Chairman, I agree with Sister Brown that we should open the committee to interested people. Just because a person goes to a union school doesn't make him or her interested in the work of an Education Committee; they may be better as stewards—or, like Charlie over here, interested in legislation. Let's put people on the committee who are interested in doing the job, and then they can get special training if they need it."

VOTE ON THE AMENDMENT

"Is there any further discussion on the amendment? There being none, we shall vote on the amendment that any interested person can be selected for an Education Committee. All in favor, say 'aye.' Those opposed, 'no.' The chair is in doubt. Let's have a show of hands. Will the secretary be the teller? All in favor of the amendment, please raise your right hand. Those opposed, like sign." The secretary takes the count and gives the results to the chair. There is a shuffle of feet and chairs in the hall.

"Quiet please," the chair calls out. "The amendment carried 46 to 42. Sister Martin, your amendment about the size of the committee is now in order."

"Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee be made up of seven members." There are several "Seconds."

"Mr. Chairman!" The sister in the third row who made the original motion rises. "I'll accept this amendment as part of my original motion."

The chair asks, "Mr. Secretary, who seconded this motion?"

The member who seconded the motions says, "I did, and I'll accept the amendment, also."

"If there is no objection, the original motion is now further amended to set the size of our Education Committee at seven. Is there any further discussion? We will now vote on the motion as amended, that the president of Local 2212 appoint an Education Committee of seven from among any interested members in the local. All those in favor say 'aye.' Opposed, 'no.' The ayes have it and the motion is carried. The chair will name the committee at the next regular meeting. Meanwhile, I will appreciate hearing from anyone who is interested in serving on this committee. I think we can all gain a great deal from such a committee, and I am looking forward to working with it.

"Is there any further new business?"

**Each member has
rights and
responsibilities
equal to those
of every other
member.**



Motions to Help Keep Order

Although we try to keep rules simple in a union meeting, not every member is likely to know all of the fine points. It is the duty of the chair to see that the rules are abided by and, equally important, that explanations of the rules are made at difficult points.

POINT OF ORDER

Even the best chair may miss a violation of rules or make a ruling the members feel is wrong. A member may call for a “point of order” if situations like these develop:

1. When a discussion seems to be wandering away from the point of the motion or its amendments, a member may rise to a point of order to force the chair to bring the discussion back to the subject.
2. When the bylaws of the local or international union are being broken, a member may rise to call the chair’s attention to this violation.
3. When the chair permits a member to discuss a “privileged” motion, the discussion should be halted, since such a motion is undebatable.

The member wishing to call the chair’s attention to an oversight or misrule simply stands and calls out: “Madam Chair, I rise to a point of order.” The member may do this even though another person who has the floor is being interrupted.

The chair must recognize this request. The chair asks: “Brother, what is your point of order?”

The brother states his “point of order” and the chair then rules on it. The chair may say this point of order is well taken or that it is not well taken.

Sometimes, members will repeatedly interrupt discussions by call-

ing for a “point of order.” In the case of minor infractions of rules, it is best to let the discussion carry on without interruptions from the floor.

A point of order should not be used as:

- ▶ A convenient way to interrupt a speaker,
- ▶ An excuse to make a speech,
- ▶ An excuse to criticize the chair, or
- ▶ An excuse to slow down a meeting.

APPEAL FROM THE DECISION OF THE CHAIR

When a member has been ruled out of order or when the point of order is not accepted by the chair, the meeting usually proceeds with the business at hand. However, when a member feels that a grave injustice has been done or that a ruling of the chair is in violation of procedure, the member may make an “appeal from the decision of the chair.” This gives the membership the opportunity to decide.

Such an appeal must be made immediately after the chair has ruled. It may be made by any member present at the meeting, and it requires a second.

The member announces: “I appeal the decision of the chair.” If there is a second, the chair may turn the meeting over to a vice chair or other designated person. Some unions require the chair to step down. The person making the appeal takes the floor and gives a reason for appealing, and then the chair states the reasons for the ruling.

This is usually the extent of the discussion. However, an appeal is debatable unless it refers to disorderly conduct, speaking off the question, the order of business or a motion that is not debatable, or unless it arises during a vote.

No member may speak more than once except the chair, who has the right to conclude such debate. The question is put to a vote in this manner:

“All those in favor of...” or, “Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?”

Immediately upon the decision on the appeal, the order of busi-

ness is resumed. The chair resumes control of the meeting regardless of the decision—sustained or overruled.

POINT OF INFORMATION

When a member thinks that more information is needed about the meaning of a motion or its effect on the local, the member may direct an inquiry to the chair simply by saying: “Point of information.”

The chair should recognize the questioner even though another person on the floor is interrupted. The chair must be on guard against members who ask frivolous questions or questions that convey opinions. Courtesy and common sense should rule.

Sometimes, the questioner desires information from another member. When this happens, the chair should ask the person holding

It is the duty
of the chair to
see that the
rules are
abided by.

the floor whether that person will yield for the purpose. The speaker cannot be forced to yield. Moreover, even if the speaker yields, the questioner must address the point of information through the chair, and the answer must be made to the chair. Members may not address one another during the meeting.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

When the specific information that a member is seeking has reference to parliamentary rules, this is a “parliamentary inquiry.”

A member may want to know whether a certain motion is in order. The chair’s answer to such a question is not a decision that can be appealed. Only a decision that the chair made after the motion was made would be subject to appeal.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE

A question of privilege is used by a member to call the attention of the chair to something that affects the well-being of the membership in the meeting. The questioner may ask to have the windows raised or lowered. The speaker may be asked to speak louder. Questions of privilege are decided by the chair and are subject to appeal.

If the question concerns the welfare of one person in the group, it is a question of personal privilege. These special privileges are the rights of all members, but they should not be used as a pretext to disrupt a meeting. Again, common sense and decency must rule.

The form for such a motion is “Madam Chair, I rise to a question of privilege.” The chair says: “State your question.” “Can we open the windows to clear the smoke?” The chair can answer: “Your privilege is granted. Will the sergeant-at-arms open the windows?”

Or, if the members propose a motion that cannot wait, the form is “Madam Chair, as a question of privilege, I move that all nonmembers leave while we discuss this business.” The chair can grant the privilege. The motion proposed then is handled like any ordinary motion. After the vote on the motion, the meeting continues.

Motions for Unusual Action

These are motions intended to help in the handling of action motions. *They cannot be debated.* Some require greater than a simple majority vote to carry support.

MOTION TO OBJECT TO THE CONSIDERATION OF A QUESTION

When a motion is made that will lead to discussion of a matter that will cause hard feelings or friction, a member may rise immediately to prevent discussion. Any member may rise and say, "Mr. Chairman, I object to consideration of this question." The chair will reply, "There has been an objection to the consideration of the question. Those in favor of considering the question say, 'aye.' Those opposed, 'no.' "

There is no discussion. It is put to a vote immediately. If two-thirds of the members vote against considering the question, then it cannot be brought up again during that meeting.

This motion should be used only in exceptional cases.

PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW A MOTION

The maker of a motion may decide to withdraw the motion and ask permission of the chair to withdraw the motion. The chair puts the question before the members: "If there is no objection, the motion will be withdrawn." If there is an objection, the question of withdrawal must be put to a vote. It requires no second. It cannot be debated. It then takes a simple majority to be withdrawn.

MOTION TO TABLE A MOTION

A motion to table postpones or delays action by a body. A membership may seem unable to reach a conclusion, or it appears more study should be given to a motion before debate continues. In such cases, a member makes a motion to “table the motion.” Such a motion cannot be debated and requires only a majority vote.

The maker of a motion to table cannot do so while speaking on the motion being discussed, or if he or she has previously spoken on the motion and there are others who wish to speak.

When a motion to table is seconded, the chair must immediately put the question of tabling to a vote. A motion to table cannot have a time limit. A motion to table until the next meeting is a motion to postpone—and a motion to postpone is debatable.

Although a motion to table often is made to kill a motion without hearing full debate, a motion that has been tabled can be “removed from the table.” This action can be requested as soon as some other business has been transacted, but no later than the second meeting.

Thus, a member may rise to be recognized and move that the matter be “removed from the table.” Again, the matter is decided without debate and by majority vote.

Killing an action by tabling a motion can be overdone. Majority rule should be able to close debate in the regular manner and defeat the motion.

LIMIT OR EXTEND DEBATE

The membership may limit debate by setting a time limit for each speaker on the same motion, by setting a time for calling the question to a vote, by prescribing the number of speeches pro and con, or by allotting a specific amount of time for each side of a question.

Motions to limit discussion are made in the usual manner and require a second. If the purpose of a motion to limit discussion is to establish general rules limiting talk on all questions before the local, it can be amended. Such a motion is debatable. If it applies only to a

motion being discussed on the floor, it is not debatable. Most unions permit a majority vote to decide upon a limitation. Strict rules of parliamentary law prescribe a two-thirds majority.

Many local union bylaws limit the time a member may talk on a motion. The usual limit is five minutes. The same set of rules usually provides that no one may speak twice on the same motion if another member is waiting to speak, although the chair may preside without such a rule.

If the membership feels the discussion should be extended after it has been limited, this may be done by a motion to extend debate. This motion must be seconded. It is not debatable, and, again, most unions accept a majority vote for a decision.

MOVE A PREVIOUS QUESTION

A motion to call for the previous question is a method of stopping all discussion on a motion and forcing a vote. In many locals, people who want to vote call out "Question" from their seats. This should not stop someone who wants to speak on a motion. As long as someone rises to speak, the chair should recognize the member.

A motion to call for the previous question starts in the usual way. The form is: "I move the previous question," or: "I move that we close debate and vote on the question."

The motion requires a second. It is not debatable. A person cannot make such a motion while speaking on the question or if the person already has spoken and there still are others who want the floor. Many unions accept a majority vote for a decision. (*Robert's Rules* requires a two-thirds majority.)

The chair should put this motion to a vote as soon as it is seconded. If the move for the "previous question" passes, then the chair should repeat, or have read, the main motion with amendments, if any, and call for a vote.

Miscellaneous Motions

NEW LOOK AT A PREVIOUS DECISION

Motion to Reconsider

If a local has approved a motion on some matter that new information or later events indicate should be reconsidered, this may be done with a motion to reconsider.

A move to reconsider can be made only on the same day that the vote was taken on the motion to be reconsidered or at the next meeting. The motion to reconsider must be made by someone who voted with the majority in the first vote. Any member may second this motion. If the vote was by secret ballot, any member may move to reconsider.

Not all motions can be reconsidered. Motions to adjourn, recess, lay on the table, take from the table, suspend the rules or a previous move to reconsider cannot be reconsidered. Nor should a motion to reconsider be used to reconsider an action that has been partially acted upon or that cannot be reversed.

Because the motion to reconsider is the correction of a mistake made by the group, it is a privileged motion, and the maker of it may interrupt a speaker and make the motion while there is other business on the floor. However, debate on the motion to reconsider does not start until the work that was on the floor has been completed.

The member desiring to make a motion to reconsider says to the chair: "I move that we reconsider the vote on...(identifying the motion)." If there is a second, the chair puts the matter of reconsideration before the group. The move to reconsider is debatable and requires a majority vote to pass. No question can be reconsidered twice.

When a motion to reconsider passes, the original motion in question is brought before the group as it was before the vote was taken and debate on it continues. The secretary should carefully read aloud

the minutes of the meeting dealing with the original debate on the question. Persons who exhausted their right to speak on the question during original debate cannot now speak, unless given permission by the body.

Motion to Rescind

A motion to rescind nullifies a previous decision of the group. Such a motion is made in the normal fashion and can be made by any member. It requires a two-thirds majority vote.

Under some circumstances, a motion can be rescinded by a majority vote. Thus, a motion passed at one meeting can be rescinded at the next meeting by a majority vote, if the members were notified at the first meeting that an attempt to rescind would be made at the next meeting. A motion to reconsider can be used instead, but some unions prefer to use a motion to rescind.

Like a motion to reconsider, the motion to rescind cannot be used to reverse an action that cannot be reversed—if money has been spent or someone has begun authorized travel.

The passage of a motion to rescind reverses a previous action. A motion to reconsider simply reopens the matter for further discussion and decision by the group. Most cases will require a motion to reconsider; this can be a matter of union bylaws or local ground rules.

Please note that a motion to rescind may be made by any member at any meeting, but a motion to reconsider must be made by a member who voted with the majority and at the same meeting at which the original motion was passed or at the next meeting.

CHANGE THE AGENDA

Motion to Suspend the Rules

Occasionally, something may come up that requires a change in the order of business. There may be a deadline on an important question. There may be a question that requires more time for debate, or a visiting speaker may want to come and go as early as possible. For these or other occasions, the chair can request a motion to suspend the rules.

This motion can be offered by a member rising and saying, “Madam Chair, since many of the members present have to make the special shift, I move that we suspend the rules and consider the question of registration now rather than wait for New Business.”

This motion requires a second. It cannot be debated. It needs a two-thirds vote to pass.

END OF THE MEETING

Motion to Adjourn

A motion to adjourn is required to end a meeting. It is particularly in order when there is no further business to come before the meeting, but it can be made at any time except during a vote or when someone has the floor. The chair can indicate when it is best to offer such a motion.

The mover first must be recognized by the chair. The motion to adjourn requires a second. It is not debatable. It takes only a majority to carry.

When the motion is made before the planned end of the meeting, the chair has the right and obligation to inform the members when items on the agenda still require action. The mover of the motion can be asked to withdraw the motion for present.

This does not mean that the members should allow the meeting to continue simply for the sake of the agenda or out of courtesy to the chair and the officers.

If the motion to adjourn is accepted, any question stopped by such action may be brought up at the next meeting as Old Business. If the motion is defeated, it cannot be renewed until the group has acted upon some other motion or report.

Motions With Peculiar Characteristics

Things a Member May Do When Another Member Has the Floor

1. Rise to a point of order, point of information or question of privilege
2. Object to the consideration of the question
3. Move to reconsider
4. Appeal

Motions That Cannot Be Amended

1. To adjourn (if the motion is to adjourn at a particular time, it can be amended)
2. To table, or to take from the table
3. To reconsider
4. To call for the previous question
5. To suspend the rules
6. To object to the consideration of the question
7. To postpone indefinitely

Motions That Cannot Be Debated

1. To fix a time to adjourn, or to adjourn
2. To object to the consideration of a question
3. To table, or to take from the table
4. To call for the previous question
5. To limit or extend debate
6. To withdraw a motion
7. To suspend the rules

Motions That Do Not Require a Second

1. To object to the consideration of a question
2. To withdraw a motion
3. To call for a division of the house
4. Point of order

Motions That Require a Two-Thirds Vote

1. To suspend the rules
2. To sustain an objection to the consideration of a question
3. To rescind (except as noted in the text)
4. To limit or extend debate (in some unions)
5. To close nominations

Motions Used to Delay Action on the Original Motion

1. To postpone indefinitely
2. To postpone for a specific time period
3. To refer to committee
4. To lay on the table

What Makes a Good Meeting?

The purpose of the union meeting is to advance the well-being of all workers by making sure members are involved in the decision making process.

A union meeting can help the members develop their group interests or can be the means of developing new interests. It can help members establish common views and ideas on issues that are important to all of them. Minimal attendance at union meetings indicates the meetings are not serving this purpose. It is not enough just to go through a routine.

A union meeting can become an endless round of dry reports, individual grievances or a series of department or shop squabbles. Listening to a grievance that only a steward can handle and a supervisor can settle is not interesting or entertaining. It is boring, and members lose interest in such meetings.

Nor should meetings attempt to be entertainment with the members as spectators. Members have other demands on their time.

More people will come if you have well-run, interesting union meetings. Officers and members can make this happen.

WHAT OFFICERS CAN DO TO IMPROVE UNION MEETINGS

- 1. Start promptly!** Establish the practice of starting on time. Give notice that the next meeting will begin promptly at 7 (or 8) o'clock. Then speak to some of the officers and members and get their promises to be there at the appointed time. When the meetings start on time, members will show up on time.
- 2. End on time!** It is a good rule to keep the meeting to 90 minutes. Many things can be handled by committees—details should not clutter up a union meeting.

3. Plan the meeting. Plan to have a lively, interesting highlight as the main event for each meeting. For example, the election of delegates to the international convention offers an opportunity to review the achievements of the international union. An international representative might be specially invited. A quiz about the services of the union, its officers and some of its history could be prepared and distributed by the Education Committee.

4. Streamline the meeting. The routine parts of the meeting can be streamlined. Make sure reports of committees and officers are prepared in advance, well-organized and brief. Correspondence should be handled efficiently. Only in unusual circumstances should “new” correspondence be read to the membership. Some letters can be handled by the officers at executive meetings and detailed to appropriate committees for action or reply.

5. Keep the meeting moving along. If you’re the chair and the membership is shy about making motions, don’t wait too long—simply say: “You have heard the report and the suggestion that this local should establish a special committee to work with the mayor’s committee. Do I hear a motion?” If you have a few people who want to talk on and on, learn how to tactfully cut them short. Sometimes even the chair must remember not to talk too much.

6. Consult the membership. Maybe the local should change the time or day of the meeting. It’s a good idea to let the members consider this from time to time. What was a good meeting night or time a year ago may be very bad now. Similarly, ask the members occasionally what they want from the meetings. Group experiences and interests change. Members need to be reminded that their participation in union meetings is vital and that they are key to what decisions get made.

Even routine matters handled by the Executive Board should be brought to the meeting in the form of minutes of the Executive Board. Then, if members think the Executive Board is deciding too many issues, they can say so.

WHAT MEMBERS CAN DO TO IMPROVE UNION MEETINGS

1. Know something about the rules of the meeting.
2. Debate the issue, not the person who presents it.
3. Ask for information when in doubt.
4. Enter the debate when a point should be made.
5. Address the chair and get recognition before talking.
6. Talk briefly and not too frequently.
7. Assume a share of responsibility for action decided upon by the group.
8. Keep informed about the union.
9. Bring a new member.
10. Bring the information back to those who could not attend.

Participation is the key to democratic procedure and a good union meeting. This doesn't mean that everyone must have something to say on every issue. Meetings profit from listeners as well as speakers. If a member listens, weighs the facts and arguments and votes, that member is making a contribution. And it is important that the listeners realize they also are contributing to the meeting. The chair should remember this and strive to keep speakers from rambling and a few speakers from dominating the debate.

In fact, a good listener can help here, too. If a speaker is getting off her point, a member can rise to a point of order and tactfully call the chair's attention to this problem.

If the listener does not understand something, a question is in order. A lot of other members probably got lost at the same time, and the question will help them. A good chair will create an atmosphere that encourages members to participate constructively at meetings.

Planning Meetings

The only way to ensure an orderly, efficient meeting is to start with a prepared agenda.

The agenda is the chair's guide for timing the various items of business so that the really important things are not crowded out. The chair should not use the agenda as an excuse to be arbitrary. The chair should be able to follow an agenda without dictating to the membership.

In many unions it's the president's duty, with the help of the Executive Board or Executive Committee, to plan the agenda for each membership meeting. They should meet a week or a few days before the membership meeting and draw up the agenda.

At such a meeting, the communications to the local (letters, faxes, etc.) can be read and turned over to the committee leaders or summarized briefly for presentation to the membership. To speed up a regular meeting, the Executive Board can have recommendations for all letters demanding action, or the committees can include the communications in their reports: members can be bored by the recording secretary reading a long series of letters. Correspondence also gives leaders of various committees topics for their reports.

The Executive Board should check the minutes of the last meeting and include any unfinished business in their working plan. They should note on their agenda which committees are due to report.

A committee reports and recommends, but the membership still makes the final decisions. And your union bylaws set up rules on what can and cannot be decided by the Executive Board.

Many unions have their own order of business as part of their bylaws or constitution. If your union has no special order of business, you might use the following:

- ▶ Call the meeting to order;
- ▶ Roll call of officers;
- ▶ Reading and approval of the minutes of the previous meeting;
- ▶ Reports of officers, committees and delegates;
- ▶ Communications and bills;
- ▶ Unfinished or old business;
- ▶ New business;
- ▶ Good and welfare; and
- ▶ Adjournment.

The order of business is just an outline to be filled in when the officers work out the agenda. Each meeting's order of business should be adjusted to meet the current needs of the local or to consider the social, economic or political issues of the day.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT

The chair should always remember that much of the meeting's business can be accomplished by unanimous consent. For example, when the minutes of the previous meeting are distributed, the chair will ask, "Are there any corrections?" And then, if none are made, "If there is no objection, the minutes will stand as presented." This same procedure may be used for communications or reports. In all instances, the purpose is not to short-cut democratic procedures, but to move the meeting to the main events.

When there are special items of business to come before the meeting, the chair may suggest changes in the agenda or even the omission of some items. This should not be a regular procedure, however, and should never be done without the consent of the meeting.

SAMPLE AGENDA

1. *Call to Order. (7 p.m.)*
 - Opening prayer and union songs.
2. *Roll Call of Officers. (7:05 p.m.)*
3. *Minutes of Last Meeting. (7:10 p.m.)*

4. *Reports. (7:20 p.m.)*
 - a) Report of Executive Board by President.
 - b) Report of Financial Secretary.
 - c) Chief Steward's Report.
5. *Correspondence. (7:50 p.m.)*
 - a) Letter from the International Union Office.
 - b) Strike appeal from Local 1808 (defer action until New Business).
6. *Old Business. (8:00 p.m.)*

None.
7. *New Business. (8:05 p.m.)*

Vote on strike appeal (Executive Board recommends \$50).
8. *Good and Welfare. (8:15 p.m.)*

Quiz on grievance procedure prepared by Education Committee and conducted by Grievance Chair.
9. *Adjournment. (8:30 p.m.)*

Tips on How to Reach Union Members

There are many ways to reach union members besides union meetings. Not everyone can or will come to a union meeting no matter how hard you try, though you can increase attendance if union meetings are more interesting and are run efficiently. How to run an interesting, democratic and efficient meeting is the subject of this booklet.

Additional ways of reaching union members have been discussed among international union and state and local central body leaders, which led to the following suggestions:

WELCOME the new member

Make new members feel they are a significant addition to the union and will share many benefits won through collective bargaining. Tell every new member about union-won benefits in a letter or a new member's kit. Plan an initiation or orientation session. Set up a mentoring program. Shop stewards should invite new members to the union meeting and explain how the union functions to protect every member's rights.

REACH OUT to the young member

Union solidarity requires the involvement of both younger and more experienced trade unionists in running the union. Recruit young members with leadership potential to serve on committees and participate in training programs, summer schools and other activities. The generation gap disappears when the democratic process works. Keep the union open to all groups and welcome their ideas.

Both new members and young members may be reached by getting to know what interests they have—such as photography, art, hunting—and ask them to use their talents and interests to help the local union.

TRAIN shop stewards

Shop stewards are a member's direct link with the union. When the shop steward can't answer questions, there's a serious break in the union's ability to function. Contract enforcement, grievance procedure, information on political action and in-plant safety all depend on a strong, well-informed, dedicated crew of shop stewards. Hold periodic classes to train new stewards and provide senior stewards with an opportunity to review the contract and swap information. The AFL-CIO has prepared a manual for shop stewards in English and Spanish; copies may be obtained by calling 1-800-442-5645 (or 202-637-5042 in the Washington, D.C., area). Check with your international union also; it may have a shop steward's manual customized to the needs of your union.

START a public relations campaign

Union members and other citizens are influenced by the distorted image of unions created by the public press. To counteract this unfavorable image, local unions should have a public relations program to get out the real story of the union, the employees, the contract and any problems. Write letters to the editor and produce news releases on union activities that are newsworthy. Learn to work with broadcast and cable TV and radio as well. For more information, contact the AFL-CIO Department of Public Affairs at 202-637-5018.

IMPROVE your union publications

Whether you publish a newsletter or a newspaper, it will be read widely only if you plan each issue carefully. By planning and working in advance, you can achieve an attractive, readable format and publish timely, relevant stories. Stick to the facts; a good news story is long on facts and short on adjectives and opinions—and uses short sentences and short paragraphs. Use cartoons, pictures and features. Announce the union meetings; the paper can help get members to attend.

COMMUNICATE using techniques to stimulate new interest and attention

Try using videotapes or colorful posters, fliers, etc. The AFL-CIO has materials available to you. Call the AFL-CIO Support Services Department toll-free at 1-800-442-5645 (or 202-637-5042 in the Washington, D.C., area) for a publications catalog containing information about items, prices and ordering.





**American Federation of Labor and
Congress of Industrial Organizations**

815 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006
202-637-5000

John J. Sweeney
President

Richard L. Trumka
Secretary-Treasurer

Linda Chavez-Thompson
Executive Vice President

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