

# How to Conduct a Chapter Meeting

*Module 116*

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MEMBER EDUCATION PROGRAM



AFL-CIO

California School  
Employees Association

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*Our mission: To improve the lives of our  
members, students and community.*

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# FOREWORD

This module addresses an important and multi-faceted problem that exists even in CSEA chapters with strong member support for the goals and activities of the union. The problem: *“How can we preserve, reinforce and increase this support at well-attended, orderly, democratic and productive chapter meetings?”*

CSEA members are justly proud of their union’s strong tradition of democratic control. This concept is part of every Association activity and action. We have democratic election of officers at the Association and chapter levels. Collective bargaining agreements are ratified by CSEA members in recognized bargaining units. There is a separation of CSEA staff from the internal politics and affairs of the union. All are prime examples of CSEA’s enduring democratic structure.

Chapter officers recognize democracy begins at the chapter meeting. Even at a well-attended chapter meeting, democracy occurs only if the meeting is conducted in an orderly manner. Members need the opportunity to discuss and debate questions that come before them. For the meeting to be democratic, informative, orderly and productive the officers and members must follow a system of rules in conducting the chapter’s business. These rules are usually referred to as “parliamentary procedure.”

The first section of this module discusses chapter meetings and parliamentary procedure in a narrative fashion. It provides ways to make meetings more interesting and methods to streamline meeting conduct. The latter part of the module provides concise treatment of the formal rules of parliamentary procedure so officers and members will have a ready reference source to answer procedural questions that may arise at meetings.



# PARLIAMENTARY RULES EQUAL DEMOCRATIC RULE

Union democracy in the chapter can be measured by the individual member by what goes on at the meeting:

- “How do I get up and say what I think?”
- “Is the meeting dominated by a small bunch of long-winded people?”
- “Do we get things done at the meeting?”
- “Can I disagree without getting shouted down or laughed at?”
- “Is it just a clique that’s really running everything?”

Rules have been established to ensure democracy and effectiveness and to eliminate confusion in meetings. Because these rules were originally based on the experience of British Parliament, they are known as parliamentary rule, or parliamentary procedure. We could refer to them as “rules for chapter meetings.” These rules are a tool to protect democratic membership control at the chapter level.

The first manual of parliamentary procedure for the U.S. Congress was written by Thomas Jefferson. The book most often used today is one which adapts the rules of Congress for use by other deliberative bodies such as fraternal organizations, political assemblies, and labor unions. It is known as *Robert’s Rules of Order*.

*Robert’s Rules* is the official reference for conducting CSEA meetings at both the Association and chapter levels. Chapters may also establish more particular rules for conducting chapter meetings within their constitutions or standing rules.

## KNOWING THE RULES

Just as learning to play a game properly requires a knowledge of the rules, playing a proper role in CSEA requires a working knowledge of the rules for chapter meetings. When only the chairperson knows the rules, he/she is handicapped and the work of the meeting suffers. When most participants have a working knowledge of the rules, the “floor,” meaning members in attendance, actually controls the meeting and the “chair” simply directs.

This doesn’t mean officers and members must memorize the rules to participate in the meeting. Many people mistakenly give a mysterious quality to *Robert’s Rules*. Some think parliamentary procedure is too formal. Others don’t want to get “bogged down” in its supposed technicalities. Actually no one should ever be expected to know everything about the rules. Even the best parliamentarian has to occasionally rely on his/her own good judgement and the common sense of the group. Remember, the rules are not “handed down from above,” but are man-made rules adopted by the very body that expects to follow them.

The rules are not that complicated. A basic understanding of the rules and the use of a few streamlined methods will help the chapter conduct its business effectively. Start with the basic principles. When in doubt, look it up or ask questions:

1. Only one subject should come before the meeting at a time.
2. Each proposal coming before the meeting shall be freely debated with meaningful discussion.
3. The will of the majority is sought, but a minority or minorities have the right to present a case.
4. Each attending member has rights and responsibilities equal to those of every other member.
5. The work of the membership should move along in such a way that the welfare of the organization, as a whole, is served.

# CHAPTER MEETINGS IN GENERAL

Lack of attendance at many chapter meetings indicates the meetings are not serving the needs of the members. It is not enough to go through a routine and expect to maintain interest. A chapter meeting should help the members develop their group interests, and can serve as a means of developing new interests. It can help members establish common views and ideas on issues important to all of them.

A non-productive, uninteresting chapter meeting is often marked by an almost endless reading of dry reports and bulletins, individual grievances, or a series of squabbles between competing special interest groups. Listening to an individual's minor grievance, that only a job steward can handle and the employer settle, is not usually interesting or entertaining. Unless the issue is of widespread concern, it is a boring experience and the members will quickly lose interest.

More members will start coming to meetings if the meetings meet their needs. Well-run, relevant meetings are possible if both officers and the members know their respective roles and cooperate with each other.

## WHAT OFFICERS CAN DO

Chapter officers, especially the president/chairperson, have the most responsibility in ensuring the meeting is successful. They are elected leaders and their actions before, during, after and between meetings will determine whether or not chapter meetings will be relevant to the members.

### Start promptly

Establish the practice of starting meetings on time. Give notice that the next meeting will begin promptly at a specific time. Speak to some of the officers and members and get them to promise to be there at the stated time. After a few instances of starting on time, other members will get the idea and start showing up before the meeting begins.

### End on time

Except in extraordinary situations, most chapter meetings should last no more than one hour (maybe an hour and a half). Items that could be referred to committees should not take up meeting time. Of course meetings dealing with contract proposals, contract ratification and elections may take longer, but these are exceptions and should not set the pattern for the more routine meetings.

### Plan the meeting

To ensure an orderly, efficient meeting, prepare an agenda beforehand. The executive board should meet at least a week before the chapter meeting to assist the chapter president in setting the agenda. At this meeting the chapter communications can be read and turned over to chapter committees, or briefly summarized for presentation to the membership. To expedite the chapter meeting, the executive board can have recommendations ready on all letters demanding action, or committee chairpersons can plan to include the

communications in their committee reports. This relieves the monotony of the chapter secretary reading a long series of letters.

The chapter president should check the minutes of the last meeting and include any “unfinished business” in their working plan. They should also note on the agenda which committees are to make reports.

It is up to the chapter president to plan a lively meeting. Guest speakers can talk on topical subjects, especially when there is no critical, time-consuming matter anticipated. The assigned labor relations representative can be asked to give a short “training session,” using material developed by CSEA. The regional representative, area director or other Association officers may be invited to address the members on Association affairs. The discussion of resolutions and the election of delegates to CSEA’s annual conference can offer an opportunity to review CSEA’s achievements, currently and over the years.

Planning is important. The agenda is the chairperson’s guide for “timing” the various items of business. A proper agenda will ensure the really important things are not crowded out. This doesn’t mean the chairperson can use the agenda as an excuse to be arbitrary. Using common sense, the chairperson can follow the agenda while still maintaining democratic procedures crucial to a CSEA chapter meeting.

The chapter president should not overplan or overcontrol what happens at the meeting. The members must be allowed to make the final decisions. The chapter’s constitution and the Association’s Constitution, Bylaws and policies establish rules of what tasks can, and what tasks cannot be taken care of by the chapter’s executive board.

### **Streamline the meeting**

The routine parts of most meetings can be streamlined. Officers can make sure officers’ and committees’ reports are prepared in advance and are well-organized and brief. Correspondence should be handled efficiently. Only in rare circumstances should “new” or “raw” correspondence be read to the members. Some letters can be handled at the executive board meeting and/or delegated to appropriate committees for action or reply.

Much of the business can be accomplished by “unanimous consent.” For example, when the minutes of the previous meeting are read (or, preferably, distributed), the chairperson may ask, “Are there any corrections?” If none are made, “If there is no objection, the minutes will stand as presented.” This same procedure may be used for communications and reports. In all instances the purpose is *not* to short-cut democratic procedures, but to move ahead to the important business and main events of the meeting.

Similarly, when there are special items of business before the members, the chairperson may suggest changes in the agenda, or even omit some items. Of course this should not be done as a regular procedure, and should never be done without chapter consent. (See: To Suspend the Rules, page 30.)

### **Keep the meeting moving**

If you are the chairperson and the members seem shy about making motions, don’t wait too long—simply say, “You have heard the report of the Political Action Committee and the recommendation that this chapter support Mr. Brown in the school board election. Do I hear a motion?” If the chairperson has an understanding of what has to get done, and has a basic knowledge

of the rules *and applies them*, the meeting will move along smoothly. As a side benefit the members will become familiar with how things should be accomplished at the meeting and prompting will become less necessary.

The opposite of “shyness” is also sometimes encountered. You may have a few people who will talk on and on. Learn how to cut them short *diplomatically*. (Sometimes even the chairperson must be reminded not to talk too much and waste the valuable time of the members.)

## **Consult the members**

From time to time ask members what they want from the chapter meetings. Group experience and interests change. If members are not attending meetings, they probably think nothing is going to happen that will interest them.

Maybe the chapter should change the time or date of the meeting. It’s a good idea to let the members consider this question periodically. What was a good meeting night or time a year ago may be wrong now.

Routine matters handled by the chapter executive board should be brought up at the general meeting in the form of a report on actions taken. If the membership thinks the executive board is deciding too many things independently, they can do something about it. Effective participation is essentially a question of *whose union is it?* Who decides what is important—the officers or the members?

## **WHAT MEMBERS CAN DO**

The mainstay of any chapter meeting is the responsible, reasonable, alert CSEA member. For meetings to succeed, members must attend and participate in making chapter decisions. A chapter membership that goes along with everything the executive board recommends may be no better than the employer boards we criticize for “rubber stamping” every decision of their district administrators.

Unfortunately, many members don’t feel comfortable speaking their mind at chapter meetings. There is a natural tendency not to express ideas that may conflict with the views of the chapter leaders and other active/vocal members. (“Who am I to disagree with these people who seem to know more about the situation and are doing all the work?”) These members may also feel what they say will appear stupid, silly or uninformed to their fellow members. (“What if they laugh at my idea?”) Finally, they may feel insecure with the process—not knowing how to raise or discuss an issue under the parliamentary rules of the meeting. (“I really think we’re beating this issue to death. I don’t know what to do, but maybe someone will make a motion to form a committee or something.”)

Like members of any democratic institution, CSEA members have the *right* to decide the direction of their organization. The decisions made—good and bad, by act or acquiescence—are also the *responsibility* of the members. Chapter members must have a feeling the chapter meeting is a place where their ideas, opinions and views, however “strange” they may seem to some, can be expressed without fear of ridicule by the chair or by other members.

If the responsibilities of CSEA membership are to be more than paying dues to the union for services rendered, the members must know how they can influence the decisions made at chapter meetings.

- They must know something about the rules of the meeting.
- They must learn to debate *the issue* not *the person* who presents it.
- They must feel comfortable in asking for information when in doubt.
- They must enter the debate when a point should be made.
- They must address the chair and get recognition before speaking.
- They must talk briefly and not too frequently.
- They must assume a share of responsibility for action decided by the group.
- They must keep informed about the affairs of CSEA and the local chapter.

While participation is the key to democratic procedure and a good chapter meeting, this does not mean everyone must have a say on every issue. Meetings can profit from listeners as well as speakers. If a member listens, weighs the facts and arguments, and votes, he/she fulfills the obligations of membership in the chapter. It's important the listeners realize they are contributing to the meeting. The chairperson should consider the listener's needs by keeping speakers from rambling and preventing a few speakers from dominating the debate.

Through his/her relatively passive participation, a good listener can contribute to the smooth operation of the meeting. If a speaker is getting off the track, the responsible listener can rise to a point of order and tactfully call the chairperson's attention to this problem. If the listener does not understand something, he/she can ask a question. Chances are other members also got lost and the question will help them. A good chapter meeting will create an atmosphere which encourages even passive members to participate constructively.

## Getting Started

As your chapter meetings become more orderly, interesting, democratic, informative and productive, "word of mouth" will cause attendance to increase. Members will attend because the meetings will address their needs, and they will want to become part of what is happening in the CSEA chapter.

If your chapter has a history of sparse attendance at chapter meetings, the question is, "How do we convince members to come to that *first* 'interesting, informative and productive' meeting so they can find out things have changed?" Unfortunately, there is no *simple* solution to this problem, and it may take awhile to turn around the people who have given up attending chapter meetings.

- **PUBLICIZE THE MEETING.** Send out special meeting notices instead of merely noting them in the chapter newsletter. The notices should be *eyecatching* and attractive and should *highlight* the planned events of particular interest to the members.

- **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CRISIS SITUATIONS.** Attendance is usually highest when the members are faced with critical issues. The large number of members in attendance at a crucial contract ratification meeting can be exposed to other interesting chapter business and activities *before* reviewing and voting on the proposed contract. If their interest is piqued, they will probably make an effort to attend subsequent regular meetings.
- **IDENTIFY A NEW CRISIS.** It is not necessary to create crisis situations. They are all around us but often are not identified as such. Increases in health insurance costs and employer/government attempts to dilute benefits may be a crisis waiting to be identified. Another identifiable crisis may be the cost and adequacy of child care for our many members who have families with the two parents working or who are heads of single-parent families. The trick is to be creative in finding issues and events that will demand member attendance.
- **BE CONSISTENTLY GOOD.** One ill-planned, boring and uneventful meeting may destroy the good effects of the previous five outstanding meetings. Make sure every meeting has at least one event that will interest the members who attend.



# OFFICER AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

After the formalities of the call to order, pledge of allegiance, roll call, introduction of guests and dealing with the minutes of the previous meeting, the first order of business at most chapter meetings is the report of officers and/or executive board, followed by committee reports.

## THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

The report of the executive board should include a description of any action taken since the last chapter meeting. Executive board actions must be within the scope of its authority as provided in the chapter's constitution.

If the executive board has exceeded its authority, the chapter can reverse the actions of the board, except for those actions that have already been accomplished. If the board has acted within its authority, action by the membership is not necessary. An executive board who works within its authority, but against the will of the membership, is subject to recall by the members. Those who exceed their authority are subject to discipline.

## THE CHAPTER TREASURER

One important part of the treasurer's job is the report of the chapter's finances. It is imperative the members see and understand the chapter's finances. A written report of receipts, expenditures and a summary financial statement should be presented at each chapter meeting. Most chapters distribute copies of each monthly financial report to all members. A helpful form for the monthly treasurer's reports is contained in the *Treasurer's Handbook*, CSEA Module 109.

Some members find financial statements hard to understand, dry and boring. Complicated items should be explained; and illustrating the report on a blackboard or screen can often help the members understand the items being read by the treasurer. The chapter may consider using the occasion of the annual financial and audit report to plan a joint education committee/treasurer program on "How Your Dues Were Spent This Year."

## CHAPTER COMMITTEES

Except in the smallest of chapters, it is impossible to do all of CSEA's work at the regular chapter meetings. There must be preliminary planning and work *before* each chapter meeting. Some matters are best discussed, investigated and, perhaps, acted upon between regular meetings of the chapter. Other routine actions don't deserve the attention of the whole chapter and yet must be done. Through the use of good, functioning committees, a chapter can improve its services to the members. In addition, a large number of members serving on committees can strengthen the organization. People taking part in a particular committee's activities will become more interested in the work of the chapter and CSEA as a whole. The committee reports and the discussion of these reports by the members can make the difference between an alive, interesting meeting and a dull, boring one.

One of the main advantages of committee action grows out of the informality of committee meetings. In small groups, the technical rules of parliamentary procedure can be largely ignored and committee members can easily take an active part in discussion. This informality allows a committee to discuss a problem or suggestion thoroughly and reach a common agreement or consensus. This consensus is reported to the members at the chapter meeting. The members can either adopt the committee's recommendation or use the committee's report as the basis for further discussion and action.

## **Committee Reports**

A committee's report to the chapter meeting should be as short and interesting as possible. It is common for the chairperson or a particularly interested member of the committee to make the report. If the issues reported upon are critical or if the report recommends or reports action, it is a good practice to submit a written report to the chapter. Operating committees should be required to report at each chapter meeting. A general, short committee report would include the following information:

- The names of its members and who attended the last committee meeting.
- The main activities of the committee—what the committee is doing.
- The problems the committee is having and why.
- The successes the committee is having and why.
- A summary of specific action recommended by the committee and/or how members could help.

Committee reports should not sacrifice detail for brevity. They should be specific as to what the committee is doing or not doing. A simple report of "progress" is not sufficient and is unfair to the members who are interested in the committee's work.

Committees should work with the executive board in devising new and different ways of reporting to the members. For example, a formal debate between committee members with opposing views could be conducted at the chapter meeting. Arrangements can be made for an outside speaker to make a presentation regarding issues before the committee. Various members of the committee can present different parts of the report to the chapter. An attractive handbill report can be distributed at the meeting and/or included in the chapter newsletter. The idea is to create interest so the members will pay attention to the important work of the committees.

## **Acting on Committee Reports**

At its place on the agenda, the members have an opportunity to *accept* or *reject* committee recommendations, usually by a majority vote. A vote for *acceptance* or *adoption* signifies approval of the committee's report and *ratifies actions taken*. When the committee's report is only for the information of the chapter, it is not necessary to take any action after it has been presented. A motion to *receive and file the report of the committee* can be confused with acceptance or adoption and is to be avoided.

When the report includes suggestions or recommendations for action, adoption or rejection should be voted one point at a time. Specific recommendations made by a committee may be amended by the members before accepting them. For example, the members may vote to raise or lower the amount of a specific contribution, change the date of a special event, or require the committee to report back to the chapter or executive board before taking final action.

If the committee's report contains recommendations for action, it is probably best to vote on them immediately after the report is read or distributed to the members. After the committee chairperson has read the report, it is common for him/her to move for its acceptance or adoption, or whatever motion is necessary to carry out the committee's recommendations. (It should be noted that action on committee recommendations may be deferred until the *unfinished business* or *new business* portions of the meeting, as appropriate. In fact, the constitutions or standing rules of some chapters may require that this be done.)



# THE CHAPTER PRESIDENT AS CHAIRPERSON

In addition to the other duties of office, the chapter president is the presiding officer or chairperson at chapter meetings. The president should have a working knowledge of the rules for conducting meetings. This does not mean that all the rules have to be crammed into his/her head. In fact, such a “walking encyclopedia” of parliamentary procedure runs the risk of becoming so enmeshed in details that the effectiveness of the meeting will suffer.

A good chairperson needs to know enough about the rules to meet the common problems of procedure that may come up at the chapter meeting. In addition, the chairperson should be familiar with constitutions, bylaws and policies of the chapter and the Association, and any special standing rules adopted by the chapter. The chairperson may have to rule on constitutional or policy questions regarding the propriety of actions proposed at the meeting. An action that violates CSEA’s fundamental rules may be questioned long after the action is taken and could cause serious problems for both the chapter and the Association.

The chairperson must be fair, impartial and courteous to everyone, much like a referee or umpire. Even though he/she is elected to the presidency by a majority vote, when acting as chairperson, the president must serve *all* the members.

As chairperson, the president’s responsibilities in conducting the meeting can be summarized by the following four points:

- Expedite the meeting by keeping it *on track* and *moving along*.
- Help the members understand what is going on—which rules apply, and why.
- Promote full discussion and informed voting.
- Protect the minority by encouraging expression of their views.

Memorizing the rules and applying them without good judgment will not make the president a good chairperson. Not every chairperson knows all the rules, faces the same situations, or conducts a meeting in exactly the same way. A good chairperson learns willingly, strives for improvement and adapts the rules and his/her particular style to new or unusual situations. The following suggestions on how to do the job and how to handle some of the situations which may arise should be helpful.

## **EXPEDITE THE MEETING**

If you know the members, you should be able to keep the meeting on track and moving along so the chapter’s business is accomplished efficiently. Be aware of those members who seem to attend solely to test the rules of procedure (the “legal eagles”) or to talk to a captive audience. Don’t let them tie up the meeting. Listen carefully to all that is said and look out for abuses

of the rules. For example, if a member uses a *point of order* as an excuse to speak on the motion being discussed, advise the member that his/her discussion is *out of order*.

Always keep the debate on the subject. Politely bring speakers back to the subject of the motion when they wander off track, even if it is necessary to interrupt them. Everyone should soon get the idea to keep on the topic under debate.

Meeting time is too valuable to allow for personal exchanges between speakers. (“The chair must interrupt Mrs. Grant and ask her to speak on the motion before the membership and to address her remarks to the chair only.”) Conversely, it may sometimes be necessary to break the silence of shy members by suggesting what has to be done procedurally to accomplish business. (“Do I hear a motion to adopt the recommendation of the legislative committee?” “Is there a second to Mr. Brown’s motion to transfer \$300 to the scholarship fund?”)

## **HELP THE MEMBERS UNDERSTAND**

Parliamentary rules can seem very complicated to many members. People often lose track of what they are voting on, particularly when there is extended debate or amendments to main motions. If members seem confused, you should repeat the question that is before them and/or the motion upon which they are about to vote. If it’s an amendment, then make it clear what the amendment says and means, and what effect their vote on the amendment will have on consideration of the main motion. (“The question before you is an amendment to a motion to contribute \$200 to the Dorothy Bjork Disaster Relief Fund. The amendment proposes to decrease the amount to \$99. Debate is confined to a discussion of the amount to be contributed. After voting on the amendment, the main motion will be open for debate—either at the \$99 amount if the amendment is carried, or at the \$200 amount if the amendment fails. Is there any discussion on the amendment?”)

A good chairperson can also help a member who is having difficulty making a point, or who may not know how to accomplish something under the rules. (“I believe you’re suggesting the chapter establish a separate political action committee. It is out of order at this time, but you can make that motion under new business which is next on the agenda after we finish with committee reports. I’ve made a note to remind you at that time.”)

## **PROMOTE FULL DISCUSSION AND INFORMED VOTING**

Everyone who has a point to make should be given the opportunity to speak. Long-winded or rambling speakers interfere with full discussion and you can ask them to shorten their remarks. (“Mr. Gray, you have already expressed your main arguments on this motion, and the chair requests that you conclude your remarks to allow time for others to speak on the motion.”)

Keep a note of those members who wish to speak on a motion. Recognize the first person who asked for the floor and indicate to the others who will be next. (“The chair recognizes Ms. Burns, who will be followed by Mr. Grant, Mrs. Brown and Mr. Wilson in that order. Ms. Burns.”)

Always take care to repeat the motion being voted on before a vote is actually taken. (“The motion before you is for the chapter to contribute \$99 to the Dorothy Bjork Disaster Relief Fund. All in favor ... ”)

## **PROTECT THE MINORITY**

If you are aware who is for or against certain motions, make an attempt to give the floor alternately to each side. If you are not sure and if one point of view is dominating the discussion, ask for opposition speakers. (“We have just heard three speakers ‘for’ the motion. The chair would like to recognize a speaker ‘against’ the motion. Are there any who wish to speak against the motion?”)

Just as the chairperson should be courteous to all speakers, members should be discouraged from belittling or laughing at minority opinions. The spirit of full discussion and CSEA democracy demands that you never let an unpopular or minority viewpoint be shouted down. (“You will all have a chance to record your opinion when it comes to a vote, but everyone has a right to state their views during the debate. Mr. Green, continue.”)

There is a natural tendency for chapter leaders who may feel they’re doing all the work to take offense at challenges to their recommendations or decisions, especially if made by a member or members they consider to be less than active in the work of the chapter. This defensiveness, though understandable, is misplaced and must be avoided for the good of CSEA and the preservation of its democratic foundations. Dues-paying members, even the inactive, seldom-seen ones, have the right to voice their opinions and to attempt to influence the direction of the union through its democratic processes.

Rather than openly attack or ridicule any uninformed criticisms voiced by inactive members, the chairperson should calmly welcome the new-found interest, encourage discussion, and cherish the thought that dissident opinions can be converted to positive support and chapter participation. Remember, even non-members have certain limited legal rights of access to the union’s decision-making process.



# THE BASIC RULES OF ORDER

All action at a chapter meeting must begin with a *motion*. The motion is the keystone of all rules of order.

In general, without a motion no report can be dealt with, no new business introduced, and no meeting adjourned. Despite the importance of the motion, it is really a simple device which should intimidate no one. Complications arise only from the way discussions are handled, the kind of motion offered and the possibility of amendments to motions.

Except in cases where an issue is placed before the members as an *agenda item* by the Chapter President or executive board, a matter can be discussed and acted upon only if a member makes a motion and another member *seconds* the motion. The rules assume any proposal that cannot get a second is not worthy of discussion. A member making a proposal in the form of a motion must offer not only a problem or issue, but a proposed solution or action. A statement such as, "We need to discuss the possibility of supporting a school board candidate," does not constitute a motion and is not sufficient to cause discussion of the issue by the members at the meeting. A motion must contain two basic parts:

1. A problem or debatable issue, and
2. A proposal that the chapter take some action.

There are several ways the issue of supporting a school board candidate could be brought before the chapter in the form of a motion:

1. "I move the chapter support Mr. Brown in the school board election."
2. "I move the political action committee investigate the qualifications of the candidates for school board office and submit recommendations at the next chapter meeting."

Both of these motions state an issue and propose an action. Assuming one of them receives a second, the debatable issue of supporting a school board candidate could now be discussed, possibly amended, and voted upon by the members.

## **HOW MOTIONS ARE MADE**

A member desiring to present a motion rises and addresses the chair as either "Mr. Chairperson" or "Madam Chairperson." Anyone in the meeting can rise to talk, but generally no one has the right to talk until he/she has been recognized by the chairperson and has been "given the floor."

Ordinarily the chairperson recognizes the first member to rise, but when two or more want the floor at the same time, the chairperson uses his/her judgment in deciding which member to recognize first. When a member has been given the floor, the rest of the group should sit and listen.

When a member is recognized by the chair, he/she can rise to offer a motion. ("Mr. Chairperson, I move that the chapter . . .") The member then sits down. Another member can then rise to be recognized to second the

motion. (“I second the motion, Mr. Chairperson.”) In some chapter 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.

In some instances a member desiring to make a motion will ask for the privilege of explaining the purpose of his/her motion before actually making it. Depending on the size of the meeting, the formality desired and the time available, the chairperson may allow the member to do this *if there is no objection from a member* in attendance. Remember, the idea is to get the work of the chapter done efficiently without ignoring democratic procedures.

## **STATING THE QUESTION**

After the motion has been made and seconded, the chairperson must repeat it so the members will know what action has been proposed. If the motion is poorly worded or confusing, the chairperson (with the consent of the person making the motion) should reword it so the meaning will be clear. If the chairperson believes that the motion is out of order, he/she should say so as soon as it is made, and state the basis for his/her ruling.

When the chairperson has restated the motion or has had it read by the secretary, he/she must then ask for discussion. (“A motion has been made and seconded that the chapter . . . Is there any discussion?”)

## **DISCUSSING THE MOTION**

The person proposing the motion is given the first chance to speak on the motion since he/she should be able to give the best arguments to support the proposal. After this opening statement, members can speak for or against the motion as they are recognized by the chair.

As previously stated, it is a good practice for the chairperson to alternate speakers for and against a motion if possible. No one should be permitted to speak twice on a motion as long as others desire to speak. Generally, a member who seldom participates should be given some preference over one who speaks frequently.

A good chairperson should endeavor to remain neutral and not become directly involved in discussion on the merits of any proposal. The chairperson should not make a speech from the chair or otherwise dominate the meeting in a way that makes the members hesitate to state their opinions. It is probably best for the chairperson to speak only when he/she feels there has not been full discussion or when the issue is so critical to the well-being of the chapter that the chairperson wants everyone to know where he/she stands on the issue. Before a chairperson speaks on a motion, he/she should leave the “chair.” In these situations the chairperson should realize his/her remarks will be better received from the floor rather than from the chair. During the period of time when the chairperson steps down, the vice president or another officer (who has not participated in the debate and does not intend to) should be appointed to chair the meeting. The chairperson does not resume the “chair” until discussion and action on the matter has concluded.

The chairperson may, however, without leaving the chair, respond to questions directed to him/her which provide information of a technical nature or are intended to clarify an issue, but without expressing an opinion on the matter.

## **AMENDMENTS AND CHANGING THE MOTION**

If debate becomes extensive or the debate indicates the motion is unclear, the members may want to change the motion a little so action can be taken. An “amendment” to a motion may be offered anytime after a motion has been seconded and stated by the chair and before debate is closed and the vote taken. The person wishing to move for an amendment to a motion must get the floor in the same manner as one speaking on the original motion, and the amendment must be seconded before it can be considered.

The amendment must be stated clearly and indicate to what part of the motion it applies. For example, someone may move that “the executive board request the employer to reopen negotiations regarding the health insurance carrier.” Another member may want to change this by saying, “I propose an amendment changing the words ‘executive board’ to ‘the negotiating committee’.”

Ordinarily amendments are made to change a motion or include more specific information. *No amendment can be offered which is directly contrary to the original motion.* For example, for the above-referenced motion, an amendment to change the motion that the executive board “not” request the reopening of negotiations would be out of order, since the same result would be obtained by defeating the original motion. An amendment must be closely related to the subject of the original motion and 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, either “as amended,” or if the amendment failed, on the motion as originally stated. In voting on the amendment, the chairperson says, “All those in favor of the amendment which strikes out the words ... and substitutes the words ... , please indicate by saying aye; those opposed, no.” If an amendment is defeated, another amendment is in order.

## **AMENDMENT TO AN AMENDMENT**

Just as it is possible to change a motion, it is also possible to change an amendment. A member may not be satisfied with the amendment and will attempt to improve it by moving an “amendment to the amendment.” An “amendment to an amendment” can only apply to the words being added or changed in the original amendment. In the example cited above, some members may feel the chairperson of the negotiating committee should make the request to reopen negotiations. They could then attempt to amend the amendment to add the word “chairperson” after “negotiating committee.” *It is important to understand that, while there can be an amendment to an amendment, there cannot be an “amendment to the amendment to the amendment;” nor can there be two separate amendments to the original motion before the members at the same time.* In the examples cited above, if someone wanted

to further amend the original motion to also request the reopening of negotiations regarding “reclassification requests”, that amendment could not be offered until the first two amendments (the amendment to the amendment, and then the original amendment) had been voted on.

In situations where numerous amendments to a main motion are being offered, a *substitute motion* may be advisable. A substitute motion can replace the original motion and include changes or suggestions brought out in discussion or offered by amendments. (“If there is no objection, the chair will entertain a substitute motion that the chairperson of the negotiating committee request the employer to reopen negotiations regarding the health insurance carrier and the reclassification issue.”) This keeps the action simple and straightforward and may help avoid the confusion of “amendments” and “amendments to amendments.” Discussion and voting simply take place on the substitute motion, which can be amended just as if it were the original motion. If the substitute motion is adopted, action on the original motion is moot. If the substitute is defeated, discussion and action continue on the original motion.

As an alternative, the chairperson can sometimes ask the maker of the motion whether he/she would be willing to accept a proposed amendment as part of the original motion. If the maker of the motion agrees (agreement by the “seconded” is not required), and no other member objects, this can be done, saving valuable time and energy. (Once a motion has been stated by the chair, it can be amended only by vote or unanimous consent, even if the maker of the motion states that he/she “accepts” the amendment.)

## VOTING

When it appears no one else wants to discuss the motion or propose amendments, the chairperson asks, “Are you ready to vote on the question?” If no one desires to speak, the vote is taken. The chairperson should always remember to use caution so debate is not cut off prematurely.

When the members are ready to vote, the chairperson or secretary reads the motion again. For a simple voice vote, the chair says, “All those in favor of this motion say aye; those opposed, no.” If the response is in favor of the motion, the chairperson says, “The ayes have it and it is so ordered.” The chairperson should always be sure to call for the “noes” as well as the “ayes” even though there seems to be a unanimous vote in favor of the motion.

When there is any doubt on the part of the chairperson or the membership as to which side has won, a vote by “show of hands” or a “standing vote” is in order. The chairperson may call for such action if in his/her judgment it is necessary. A member may also call for such a vote by simply calling out the words “division of the house” or “division” from his/her seat. The chairperson must grant this request *at all times*. It is neither debated nor voted upon. An actual count of those voting should be made unless the result is so obvious as to be without question.

On very important questions (elections, strike vote, contract ratification) voting is always by secret ballot. Various rules and bylaws may require certain other 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 to pass requires a simple majority vote.

# MOTIONS TO KEEP ORDER

The point of this entire module is to keep the meeting and the rules governing the conduct of the meeting simple, orderly and as uncomplicated as possible. As simple as we try to keep the rules, not every problem can be resolved informally. It is the chairperson's responsibility to see rules are abided by and explained should the need arise. There is a procedural rule to cover most, if not all, questions that may come up regarding the proper conduct of the meeting.

## **POINT OF ORDER**

Even the best chairperson may miss a violation of the rules or make a ruling that is felt to be wrong. A member may call for a *point of order* if situations like the following develop:

- When discussion seems to be wandering away from the point of the motion, a member may raise a point of order to force the chairperson to bring the debate back on the subject.
- When the constitution, bylaws, standing rules or policies of the chapter or Association are being broken, a member may rise to call the chairperson's attention to the violation.

A member wishing to call the chairperson's attention to an oversight or misrule simply stands at his/her place and calls out, "Mr./Madame Chairperson, I rise to a point of order." This may be done even though it interrupts another member who has the floor. The chairperson must recognize this request. "Mr. Smith, what is your point of order?" After the point of order is made, the chairperson must rule on the question raised.

A point of order should never be used as:

- An excuse to slowdown a meeting.
- A convenient way to interrupt a speaker.
- An excuse to make a speech.
- An excuse to criticize the chairperson.

## **APPEAL FROM THE DECISION OF THE CHAIR**

When the chairperson determines that the member's interruption is out of order or when a member's point of order is not accepted by the chairperson, it is usual to proceed with the business at hand. However, if a member feels that a ruling of the chairperson is in violation of procedure, he/she may make an "appeal from the decision of the chair." This appeal requires a second by another member. The members in attendance will thus be given the opportunity to decide the question. Remember, it is their meeting!

Such an appeal can only be made immediately after the ruling by the chairperson and before any debate or other business has intervened, and it may be made by any member present at the meeting. The member simply

announces, "I appeal the decision of the chair." The person making the appeal takes the floor, after the second, and gives his/her reason for appealing. The chairperson then 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, a motion which is not debatable, or unless it arises during a vote. No member may speak more than once on an appeal except for the chairperson, who has the right to first state his/her reasons for the ruling, and after all have spoken who wish to do so, to conclude the debate by answering arguments against the decision and/or giving additional reasons for his/her decision. The question is then put to a vote. ("Shall the ruling of the chair be upheld?") A majority or a tie vote sustains the decision of the chair. The chair has a vote, even if his/her vote will create the tie. Immediately upon the decision on the appeal, the order of business is resumed.

## **PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY**

When the specific information a member is seeking has reference to the rules of the meeting, it is a "parliamentary inquiry." For example, a member may want to know if a certain motion is in order. The chairperson's answer to such a question is not a decision that can be appealed, since it is only an opinion, not a ruling on a question that has actually arisen. Only a decision by the chair after the motion has been made is subject to appeal.

## **POINT OF INFORMATION**

If a member feels the need for more information about the meaning of a motion or its effect on the chapter, an inquiry may be directed to the chair. The member simply rises and says, "point of information." The chairperson should recognize the questioner even though it interrupts another member who has the floor. However, if the question does not require an immediate answer, the chair may delay the response until the interrupted speaker has concluded his/her remarks.

If the questioner desires information from a member who is speaking, the chairperson should ask the person holding the floor if he/she will yield for this purpose. The member cannot be forced to yield the floor, since if he/she does so, the time is taken away from his/her allotted speaking time. If the speaker yields the floor, the questioner must address his/her point of information through the chairperson and the answer must be made through the chair. *Members may not directly address one another during the meeting.*

Obviously, the point of information procedure is easily subject to abuse through the asking of frequent or frivolous questions or questions which convey opinions. The chairperson should be on guard against abuses of this sort. Courtesy and common sense should rule.

## **QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE**

A question of privilege may be used by a member to call the attention of the chairperson to something that affects the well-being of the members at the meeting. For example, a member may ask to have the windows raised or low-

ered or ask that a speaker talk louder. Such questions of privilege are decided by the chairperson, subject to appeal. (If the question concerns the welfare of one person in the group it is a question of “personal privilege.”) Common sense and decency must rule and a question of privilege cannot be allowed to disrupt the meeting.

Another form of the question of privilege may be used to propose a motion which cannot wait and must be dealt with immediately, even while another motion is on the floor. (“Mr. Chairperson, as a question of privilege, I move that all non-members leave while we discuss this business.”) The motion requires a second, and is handled like any ordinary motion before picking up where the meeting was interrupted.



# MOTIONS FOR UNUSUAL ACTIONS

Some motions are intended to help in the process of handling action motions. They cannot be debated and some require more than a majority vote to carry.

## **TO OBJECT TO THE CONSIDERATION OF A QUESTION**

When a motion is made which will lead to discussion of a matter that may be irrelevant or may cause hard feeling or friction, a member may rise immediately to prevent discussion. The form of the motion is, "I object to consideration of this question." The chairperson will reply, "There has been an objection to the consideration of this question. Those in favor of considering the question say aye; those opposed, no."

No second is required, there is no discussion or debate, and the objection is put to a vote immediately. If *two-thirds* of the votes cast are against considering the question, it cannot be brought up again during that meeting.

The object of this motion is not to cutoff debate (for which other motions are available), but to enable the members to avoid altogether any question it deems irrelevant or otherwise unworthy of discussion. This motion is meant to be used only in exceptional situations.

## **WITHDRAWING A MOTION**

The maker of a motion may subsequently decide to withdraw it. He/she asks permission of the chairperson to withdraw the motion and the chairperson 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 and cannot be debated. Withdrawal requires a simple majority vote.

## **TO TABLE A MOTION**

A "motion to table" postpones or delays action by the chapter. The members present may seem unable to reach a conclusion or perhaps it appears more study should be given to the issue before debate continues.

A motion to "table" requires a second, cannot be debated and needs only a majority vote to carry. A motion to table cannot have a time limit. (A motion to *table until the next meeting* is actually a motion to postpone, and a motion to postpone is a debatable motion.)

Despite the fact that most of the time a motion to table is made with intent to kill a motion without hearing full debate, a motion which has been tabled can be "removed from the table." A motion to remove from the table can be made as soon as some other business has been transacted, *but not later than the next meeting of the chapter*. The motion "to take from the table ..." requires a second and is decided without debate and by majority vote. The motion once taken from the table becomes the main motion, subject to full debate and action in the normal manner.

If the matter is not removed from the table by the end of the next chapter meeting, the motion dies. However, attempting to kill an action by use of the motion to table should only be used in unusual situations. If the desire is truly to prevent any discussion, “Objection to consideration” would be the proper motion. Otherwise, majority rule should be able to close debate in the regular manner and then defeat the motion.

If the desire is simply delay action on the issue until further information can be gathered, either of the motions “to postpone (to the next meeting or to a definite time)”, or “to refer (to a committee or the executive board) for further study”, would be the appropriate motions. Both of these motions require a second, are debatable and amendable, and are decided by majority vote.

## **TO LIMIT OR EXTEND DEBATE**

*Robert’s Rules* limits the time a member may talk at any one time to ten minutes, provides that no one may speak more than twice on any one motion, and that no person may speak a second time on the same motion if another member is waiting to speak. These rules apply to all chapters.

The members at a meeting may further limit debate by setting a more restrictive 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. All such motions require a second, are not debatable, and require a two-thirds vote. They may be made applicable to all motions brought before the particular meeting at which they are adopted, or only to a particular question under discussion. They are not long-standing in nature and do not carry over to subsequent chapter meetings. If it is felt that discussion should be extended after it has been limited, this may be done by a motion and second to extend debate, which also requires a two-thirds vote to carry.

Even without a rule or motion, the chairperson, in most situations, can discreetly use his/her authority to encourage brevity on the part of the speakers.

## **TO MOVE THE PREVIOUS QUESTION (TO CLOSE DEBATE)**

A motion to call for “the previous question” is a method of stopping all discussion on a motion and forcing a vote. Various forms may be used—“I move the previous question,” “I move that we close debate,” or “I move that we vote on the question.”

This motion requires a second, cannot be debated and requires a two-thirds vote for passage. The chairperson must put this motion to a vote as soon as it is seconded. If the motion passes, the chairperson should repeat or have read the main motion and call for a vote.

If a motion to end debate fails, it cannot be moved again until further discussion has intervened.

# MISCELLANEOUS MOTIONS

## MOTION TO RECONSIDER

If the chapter has adopted or defeated a motion on a matter that later events or new information indicates should be reconsidered, a “motion to reconsider” may be made. *A motion to reconsider can only be made at the same chapter meeting as the original motion was carried/lost, can only be made by a member who voted on the winning side in the original vote, and requires a second.*

Not all previous actions are subject to a motion to reconsider. Motions to adjourn, recess, lay on the table, take from the table, suspend the rules, or a previous motion to reconsider which has lost cannot itself be reconsidered. Nor can a motion to reconsider be applied to a previously adopted motion whose provisions have partly been carried out; to an affirmative vote in the nature of a contract where the party to the contract is present when the vote is taken or has been notified of the outcome; or to any other vote which has caused something to be done that it is impossible to undo.

The member desiring to make a motion to reconsider says to the chair, “I move that we reconsider the vote on (identifies the motion).” If there is a second, the chairperson calls for discussion on whether the original motion should be reconsidered, and puts the matter to a vote. The motion to reconsider requires only a majority vote to carry. Adoption of a motion to reconsider *does not rescind the original motion*. It merely brings it back before the chapter to discuss and vote upon again.

When a motion to reconsider passes, the original motion in question is brought before the chapter as it was before the original vote was taken and debate on it continues. The original motion is then voted upon in the regular manner. No question can be *reconsidered twice*.

While the *motion* to reconsider must be made and seconded at the same chapter meeting as the original motion was acted upon, the discussion and vote on whether or not the reconsideration should be granted, and the actual reconsideration of the original motion, can take place at the next regular chapter meeting, or at a special meeting prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting if announced in the meeting notice. This allows time to assemble new information if necessary.

The effect of *making* a motion to reconsider is the immediate suspension of all action that depends on the result of the vote to be reconsidered, either until the chapter acts on the motion to reconsider and, if adopted, until the reconsideration is completed, or until the time limit for taking action on a reconsideration expires at the close of the next regular chapter meeting.

For example, let’s assume:

- a motion to contribute all of an available amount of money to the Dorothy Bjork Disaster Relief Fund is voted down; then,
- a motion to spend the same money for a chapter picnic is then made and adopted; and,

- before the meeting closes it is moved to reconsider the vote on the motion to contribute the money to the Dorothy Bjork Disaster Relief Fund; and
- the motion to use the money for the Disaster Relief Fund is reconsidered and adopted,

it will be impossible to spend the money on a picnic. Therefore, the planning of the picnic must be held up until the reconsideration of the Disaster Relief Fund is disposed of.

## **MOTION TO RESCIND**

A motion to rescind nullifies a previous decision of the chapter. Such a motion is handled as if it were a main motion, but it normally requires a two-thirds vote for passage. A motion to rescind can be passed by a simple majority if all members are notified in advance that an attempt to rescind will be made at the meeting.

Unlike a motion to reconsider, there is no time limit on making this motion, and it can be moved by any member regardless of how they voted on the original question. But similar to a motion to reconsider, the motion to rescind cannot be used to reverse an action that cannot be reversed. For example, money has been spent, an agreement has been signed or someone has already left on a trip, or as in the nature of a contract, and the other party has been informed of the vote. The adoption of a Constitution/Bylaws provision cannot be rescinded, except by the process of further amendment to remove, add, or reinstate language. Whereas a motion to reconsider delays implementation of the vote while the matter is reopened for further discussion, the passage of a motion to rescind actually reverses or nullifies a previous action.

## **TO SUSPEND THE RULES (CHANGE THE ORDER OF BUSINESS)**

Occasionally something may come up that requires a change in the order of business or the meeting agenda. 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 leave as early as possible. For these or other situations, the chairperson can request a motion to *suspend the rules*.

This motion can be offered by a member in the following manner, “Since many of the members present have to leave for work in an hour, I move that we suspend the rules and consider the question of political endorsements now rather than wait for new business.”

A motion to suspend the rules requires a second, cannot be debated and needs a two-thirds vote to carry.

## **MOTION TO ADJOURN (TO END THE MEETING)**

A motion to adjourn is required to end a meeting and is in order when there is no further business to conduct. The chairperson may indicate when it is best to “entertain a motion to adjourn.”

A member can make a motion to adjourn at any time during the meeting except during a vote or when someone has the floor. The mover must first be recognized by the chairperson and the motion requires a second. It is not debatable and requires only a majority to pass.

When the motion is made before the planned end of the meeting, the chairperson has the right and obligation to point out what things the chapter's executive board thinks should be considered and acted upon at the meeting. The chairperson can ask the mover to withdraw his/her motion for the present. The members, however, should not allow the meeting to drag on simply for the sake of the agenda or out of courtesy to the chairperson or the officers.

If the motion to adjourn passes, any business items remaining on the agenda, including any question that has been interrupted by such action, are included in the next meeting agenda under "old business." If the motion is defeated, it cannot be renewed until the group has acted upon some other motion or report.



## AFTERWORD

The body of this module assumes the chapter has a program encouraging broad-based member support of CSEA, and leaders who have a general awareness of the needs and desires of the members. It also assumes the executive board is secure in its ability to direct the affairs of the chapter between meetings and has the authority (with membership approval) to delegate tasks and responsibility back to the individual members serving on chapter committees.

Unfortunately, not all chapters conform to this model and not all chapter meetings are either productively or democratically conducted. In fact, some CSEA chapter meetings are simply boring and may fit the following description:

There is no agenda, no relevant information is presented and the chapter's executive board makes no effort to bring "action items" before the few members who bother to attend. No meeting notices are distributed because the chapter secretary thinks "it's the public relations officer's job" and vice versa. Besides, the chapter president feels "if members were interested and active in CSEA, they would know we always meet the Thursday following the third Wednesday of every month—except in years when Thanksgiving happens to fall on that day ..."

On the night of the meeting three bargaining unit employees are in the audience—two of whom happen to be close friends of the president and didn't want to hurt his/her feelings. Most of the executive board is in attendance, except for two officers who didn't want to miss the second segment of a two-part situation comedy on TV. The one new face at the meeting is a recently hired employee who wants to find out how the union works before signing up.

According to the chapter's constitution there is a lack of a "quorum" and the meeting soon turns into a coffee klatch. The new employee (and potential new member) leaves after 15 minutes, never to be heard from again. Those remaining spend the next hour complaining about the amount of time they devote to CSEA and criticizing the shameful apathy of the rest of the members. They finally agree on the "best way" to encourage attendance at future meetings: If someone should ask, "What happened at the chapter meeting?", they will reply "If you were really interested, you would have been there!" (At least this negative and counterproductive "encouragement" will cause no immediate harm because, in reality, *nothing did happen at the meeting.*)

If this description sounds familiar because it reflects your chapter's experience, this training module offers no solutions. A discussion of how to conduct a chapter meeting assumes you *have a meeting to conduct.*

In some chapters, officers are tempted (by apparent necessity) to make many decisions without formal input, debate or action by the members at a chapter meeting. Chapter meetings may become no more than the medium to *announce decisions*, rather than the forum to *discuss issues and reach decisions*. The “necessity” for this is often explained as resulting from apathy or lack of understanding among rank and file members.

In some other chapters, the elected leaders tend to involve the entire membership in *all* chapter decisions—however minor or routine the issues may be. Putting every grievance handling decision to a vote of the chapter, for example, may be explained as “pure democracy”—even though the results may be unworkable and not in the best interests of the members and their union.

Both of these extremes demonstrate misunderstanding and misapplication of how the chapter meeting fits into the concept of “democratic control” of CSEA. CSEA is a *membership* organization, *owned* and *controlled* jointly by the people it represents. The responsibilities of collective ownership and control are expressed through a democratic political structure, the base of which is the local chapter meeting.

The political structure of CSEA is, more specifically, a representative democracy. The conduct of CSEA business should be neither dictatorial nor anarchistic. Members freely elect leaders at a chapter meeting and delegate to them a certain amount of authority. The ability of CSEA chapter officers to effectively exercise this authority is, in turn, judged by the support they receive from the members who elected them. To be judged effective and to preserve member support, elected chapter officers must constantly strive to promote member involvement in the affairs of the chapter—a major part of this is meant to occur at regular meetings.

The part of leadership appealing to many people is the “authority to get things done.” This authority is often euphemistically expressed as “the right to exercise independent judgement” or, somewhat more vaguely, “If I were the boss, I’d show them how to run this place!” What is often left unsaid, is with *authority* comes *responsibility and accountability*. In CSEA, as in other democratic institutions, the people over whom the leader has authority are the same people to whom the leadership is accountable. In fact, one of the major responsibilities of CSEA chapter office is to promote the very system (democratic membership control at chapter meetings) which restricts officers’ authority and makes them more accountable.

Much like American society in general, the diversity of the CSEA membership works against any formal organizational plan that attempts to delegate decision-making to individuals and committees in the name of efficiency. Even though there is a commonality of interest between members, based upon their shared status as members of a recognized bargaining unit, there is no universal identity of interests. Each special interest group and each member may have separate priorities and differing opinions about what is “right” for the chapter.

In the interest of efficiency and effectiveness, it is recognized that chapter leaders, including executive board members, job stewards and committee members, must be given the authority to make many decisions on behalf of the members collectively. Ultimately the right to this authority and the right to

delegate responsibility to others *is given or not given* by vote of the members at chapter meetings.

Chapter leaders truly concerned about a breakdown in membership involvement must revitalize the chapter meetings and revive the chapter itself. Various good ideas and proven methods to accomplish this are included in the following CSEA training modules:

- Module 105—*The Chapter Executive Board*
- Module 108—*The Chapter Secretary*
- Module 110—*The Chapter Public Relations Officer*
- Module 501—*Introduction to Representation*

Assistance is also available from your regional representative, area director and from CSEA staff.



# THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AT A GLANCE

## APPENDIX A

The official order of business may vary from chapter to chapter depending upon local custom and the provisions of the chapter's constitution and standing rules. The sample outlined below is a common variation.

- Quorum Established** Before calling the meeting to order, it must be determined if a quorum exists. Unless the chapter has otherwise defined a quorum in its constitution, a quorum is a *majority* of all members of the chapter. No official business can be conducted without a quorum and no vote can be taken, except to adjourn, or to fix the time for an “adjourned meeting.”
- Call to Order** A quorum being present, the chairperson calls the meeting to order.
- Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag** The chairperson asks a member to lead the flag salute.
- Roll Call of Officers** The chairperson either calls the roll of officers or announces for the record the names of the officers present, absent and/or excused.
- Approval of Minutes** The secretary either reads the minutes of the previous chapter meeting or announces that they have been distributed or posted, as appropriate. The chairperson will ask if there are any questions or corrections. Members may suggest corrections without motion or vote. (It is the custom in some chapters to formally approve the minutes by motion, second and majority vote.)
- Official minutes shall be signed by the president and secretary following approval by the membership—CSEA Constitution, Article III, Section 5.(d).
- Communications and Correspondence** The secretary will read or summarize correspondence received and sent by the chapter. Action may be necessary on some communications, such as Association bulletins. If so, action should normally be deferred until “new business” and the matter should be included as an agenda item by the executive board.
- Officer Reports** If there is a need for membership ratification of any executive board action, it should be presented here. If any officer's or the executive board's report contains recommendations, action on them should normally be deferred to “new business,” and the matter should be included as an agenda item by the executive board.

**Officer Reports**  
(continued)

The treasurer's financial statement is distributed and explained to the membership. It should at least provide a beginning balance, a detail of expenditures and income, and an ending balance.

Except for expenditures which may have been pre-approved by the membership through adoption of an annual chapter budget, unpaid bills may be presented at this time to authorize payment, which is accomplished by motion, second and majority vote. Otherwise a motion is made to adopt only an *audited* financial report such as the annual report. No action is taken on an *unaudited* report. It is simply reported, received and filed without a motion or vote.

At this time other chapter officers may also report to the membership regarding the activities of their particular office. The chapter president should report on any official actions taken by the executive board as a whole on behalf of the membership.

**New Members**

New members should be introduced and welcomed into the chapter and CSEA. Preferably, the appropriate site representative, job steward or person who recruited the new member should perform the introduction.

**Introduction of Guests**

The chairperson will introduce any guests present including non-members and guest speakers. The labor relations representative, regional representative and any Association officer are *guests* and should be introduced.

Any presentation by a guest speaker or reports of Association officers or CSEA staff may be made at this time.

**Committee Reports**

The reports of all standing and special committees are made at this time. If the report contains recommendations, the committee member making the report normally moves that the recommendation(s) be adopted. Otherwise committee reports are read (and/or distributed), received and filed without formal action.

Special presentations or entertainment may also be presented during this portion of the meeting. This may consist of a lecture, a film, a demonstration, a training session conducted by a CSEA officer or staff person, etc.

**Unfinished Business** Action is completed on any business not settled when the last chapter meeting adjourned. Unfinished business is known to the executive board in advance and should be placed on the agenda that is distributed with the meeting notices.

**New Business** New business includes any items placed on the agenda by the executive board for discussion and/or action, and motions which bring up a new item of business made and seconded by members in attendance at the meeting. (Some chapters establish procedures for members to place items on the agenda prior to the chapter meeting. These issues would generally be handled under new business.)

Each agenda item or new motion is discussed and disposed of before another main motion can be proposed.

Agenda items such as election of officers, approval of contract proposals and ratification of tentative collective bargaining agreements are normally handled under new business. (Some chapters may choose to deal with these issues immediately after hearing the report(s) of the appropriate committee(s). Remember, if the chapter has more than one recognized bargaining unit, only unit members of the chapter can vote on issues pertaining solely to their unit, such as election of their unit vice president, contract proposals, etc.)

**Good of the Order** The chairperson will ask for any announcements or other discussion from the members present.

This portion of the meeting presents an opportunity for members to make informal comments, announcements or suggestions that do not require official action and need not be made in the form of a motion.

No main motion calling for official chapter action can be accepted under good of the order. Procedural motions, such as a motion to adjourn, can be made and voted upon. For example, it is proper to move “to suspend the rules” to return to “new business” so an issue informally raised under good of the order can be acted upon. (Remember, a motion to “suspend the rules” requires a second, cannot be debated and needs a two-thirds vote to carry.)

Good of the order is much like the chapter acting as a “committee of the whole.” The technical rules of parliamentary procedure do not apply, and especially in small groups, fruitful discussion can occur and important information can be conveyed.

**Adjournment**

The chairperson will state, “if there is no other business, the meeting will stand adjourned.”

If the members wish to adjourn the meeting before all business is completed, the meeting may only be adjourned by a motion, second and majority vote.

*Note:* This order of business is keyed to the sample “Agenda” and “Agenda Record Form” which are Appendices of Module 108—*Chapter Secretary*.

# MOTIONS WITH PECULIAR CHARACTERISTICS

## **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 remove from the table.
3. To reconsider.
4. To call for the previous question (to end debate).
5. To suspend the rules.
6. To object to the consideration of a 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 remove from the table.
4. To call for the previous question (to end debate).
5. To limit or extend debate. (See page 20.)
6. To withdraw a motion.
7. To suspend the rules (the order of business).

## **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 (showing of hands, standing vote).
4. Point of order.
5. Nominations for office.

## **MOTIONS THAT REQUIRE A TWO-THIRDS VOTE**

1. To suspend the rules (order of business).
2. To suspend or delete a standing rule.
3. To sustain an objection to the consideration of a question.
4. To rescind (except when prior notice of attempt to rescind is provided).
5. To limit or close debate.
6. To close nominations for office.

# TABLE OF MOTIONS

## APPENDIX C-1

The chart on page 45 is designed to be a quick reference guide for a chairperson when he/she is conducting a chapter meeting. It contains a list of the motions most often used at CSEA meetings. Motions most frequently used are printed in CAPITAL LETTERS.

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

As can be seen on the chart, there are three groups of motions other than main motions:

- **Privileged motions** which have a very high priority. They are motions which, while having no relation to the pending question, are of such urgency that they take priority over all other motions.
- **Incidental motions** are motions which arise out of main motions or other pending questions and must be decided before the pending question or before other business is addressed.
- **Subsidiary motions** are motions to dispose of or change a main motion or certain other motions.

Please note, no simplified chart can enumerate all the very fine points of parliamentary procedure, but it can be helpful in the usual situations.



# TABLE OF MOTIONS

## APPENDIX C-2

		Debate	Amendable	Second	Vote
<b>Privileged Motions</b>	ADJOURN	No	No	Yes	Majority
	Recess	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
	Question of Privilege (treat as main motion)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
<b>Incidental Motions</b>	POINT OF ORDER	No	No	No	No Vote (If appealed, then Majority)
	Appeal	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
	Objection to Consideration of the Question	No	No	No	Two-thirds
	Withdrawal of Motion	No	No	No	Majority
	SUSPENSION OF RULES (order of business)	No	No	Yes	Two-thirds
<b>Subsidiary Motions</b>	Lay on the Table	No	No	Yes	Majority
	PREVIOUS QUESTION (close debate)	No	No	Yes	Two-thirds
	Limit or Extend Debate	No (see text)	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds (see text)
	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
<b>Main Motions</b>	MAIN MOTION	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
	To Reconsider*	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
	To Rescind*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds (Majority if previous notice given)
	To Suspend or Delete A Standing Rule	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds

(\**Note:* Motions to reconsider or to rescind treated as if main motions.)



# CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING FOR CHAPTER MEETINGS

## APPENDIX D

- Has the executive board met to plan the agenda?
- Have the officers been contacted and general publicity about the meeting been handled?
- Are the minutes of the previous meeting ready for presentation?
- Is the correspondence ready for presentation (including Association bulletins)?
- Are committees prepared to report? (Do they know when and how much time they have been given to report?)
- Have the arrangements and preparations for the meeting room been made? (flag, heat, lights, ventilation, chairs, restrooms, etc.)
- Is all special equipment ready to use? (easels, projector, microphones, television equipment, etc.)
- Are program arrangements complete? (Have education videos, pamphlets, etc. arrived?)
- Are materials ready for distribution? (agenda, financial reports, minutes of last meeting, committee reports, announcements, handouts, bulletins, etc.)
- Have arrangements been made for guests or special speakers? (Do they know when and where the meeting is being held? Do they know what you expect them to do?)

