

PARLIAMENTARY LAW

IN

CONSTITUENT BLUE LODGES

OF

THE GRAND LODGE OF TEXAS A.F. & A.M.

PREFACE

This introduction to Parliamentary law in the Masonic Blue Lodge is designed for practical use by Lodge line officers and by current and future District Deputy Grand Masters. It is to be hoped, however, that every interested Master Mason will become familiar with the subject, thereby assisting the Worshipful Master in his conduct of lodge business as well as insuring the orderly and concordant transactions of such business.

Any Lodge member well versed in Masonic parliamentary procedure can add immeasurably to the peace and harmony so essential to maintain the proper fraternal atmosphere; however the Worshipful Master himself, if he is prudent and wise, will acquire the knowledge necessary to preside with sure and certain confidence.

The material herein presented is extracted primarily from a previous publication prepared by Past Grand Master Robert L. Dillard Jr., and subsequently incorporated into the 1975 Regional Conferences by Grand Orator Jack B. Lee. The fundamental material has been somewhat augmented, and a number of explanatory notes have been added.

R.:W.: Brother Dillard has graciously consented to the inclusion and alteration of this contribution; and he has also received, reviewed, and endorsed this current revision by Brother Lee.

Robert B. O'Connor
Grand Master 1975

INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary law consists of accepted rules, both written and unwritten, by which organized assemblies govern their deliberations. The term "parliamentary" refers to the British parliament; but it is derived primarily from the French word "parier", meaning "to speak". Parliamentary law, therefore, is concerned with proper procedures controlling speaking in a deliberate assembly.

The purpose of parliamentary law is to (a) maintain decorum, (b) ascertain the will of the majority, (c) protect the rights of the minority, and (d) assist the assembly toward its goal: the orderly, expeditious, and equitable disposition of business.

Legislative bodies (such as the Congress and state legislatures) have developed highly complex parliamentary procedures peculiar to their particular needs. Most organized assemblies, however, transact business under a blend of rules prescribed by their own by-laws, established by tradition, decreed by the presiding officer, and delineated by a parliamentary text such as Roberts' Rules of Order,

Sturgis' Code of Parliamentary Procedure, or De Meter's Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure.

Masonic Lodges are not bound by the usual and customary parliamentary rules of order because the entire structure, purpose, and function of Freemasonry is unlike that of any other organization. The background, history, customs, and usages of Freemasonry are so different from other voluntary associations as to require special rules of order. Although some of these rules are in the Constitution and Laws of the Grand Lodge of Texas, many others are in the edicts and decisions of Grand Masters and reports of Committees, approved by the Grand Lodge of Texas and reported in its Proceedings as far back as 1837. Even the codified rules reflect Masonic landmarks, ancient customs and traditions, and Grand Lodge actions for 138 years.

Such parliamentary texts as Roberts, Sturgis, or DeMeter, therefore, have no place in the Blue Lodge because they are not consonant with basic Masonic principles; consequently, it would be inappropriate to rely on such texts for guidance in Masonic parliamentary procedure.

THE WORSHIPFUL MASTER

The parliamentary focal point in the Masonic Blue Lodge is the East. The Worshipful Master, unlike the presiding officer of any other deliberative assembly, is vested with virtually limitless parliamentary power—so much power, in fact, as to be awesome. It is his paramount duty to preserve order and decorum in the lodgeroom, and he may take just about whatever steps he deems necessary to fulfill this duty.

The WM has the right—indeed, the responsibility—to preside; however, at his pleasure he may request and permit another Brother to do so, provided that the Brother is a current Warden or a Past Master of the WM's Lodge. The WM may then resume the gavel whenever he so desires.

The WM must supervise both the business and the work of the Lodge. He is the custodian of the Lodge Charter, is responsible for its proper display in his Lodge, and is charged with its safekeeping. He is also responsible for the accuracy of the minutes, and he may order any correction thereto at the next stated meeting.

When the WM raps the gavel, he takes charge of his Lodge, demanding silence in the room and requiring every Brother to be properly clothed and seated. Any Brother who disobeys the gavel may be reprimanded by the WM and/or may be ordered from the room.

Unique among presiding officers, the WM may propose any motion; may second and motion

(except an incidental motion)¹, may initiate, participate in, and terminate debate; and, subject to Grand Lodge Law and his own Lodge By-Laws, may open and close Lodge at his will and pleasure. The WM, furthermore, may reject any motion which he deems to be in violation of Grand Lodge Constitution and Laws, in conflict with the landmarks and customs of Freemasonry, or in danger of jeopardizing the peace and harmony of the Lodge itself.

Under Grand Lodge Laws the WM may require every member of his Lodge present to vote upon any pending question.² The WM himself is not empowered with a casting vote, i.e., a second vote; if he has already voted and there is a tie, the proposition under consideration is defeated.

The WM decides and rules on all points of order, and there is no appeal from his decision except to the Grand Master and/or the Grand Lodge.³ Such an appeal must be in writing and signed by three members of the Lodge, pursuant to the provisions of Grand Lodge Law. Article 283.

The Worshipful Master is indeed vested with supreme authority; fortunately, however, Masons hold this office in such high esteem that most WM's themselves appreciate the honor and significance of the office and generally evidence a sincere desire to preside justly, fairly, impartially, and courteously.⁴

Grand Lodge Laws Article 333 provides that "each Lodge shall conduct its business as

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nearly as possible according to the rules of order established in Articles 168 to 176, inclusive,—”.

Article 333 delineates the order of business for a stated meeting but also allows the WM and / or the Lodge to alter the prescribed order. The model bylaws (Form 23) in Article XII delineate the same order of business “unless otherwise ordered by the Lodge or the WM”. Thus, the conduct of Lodge business as he deems appropriate.

Article 170 governs the actions of members who speak in Lodge. The member must rise, address the WM (not the Lodge !)⁵, await recognition, and then speak to the issue under consideration. If two or more members rise simultaneously, the WM determines who shall speak first: and there is no appeal on this point.

A member may not speak more than twice on a given subject at the same meeting, unless to explain or unless the WM specifically grants him permission to speak again.

When a member is speaking, there must be no interruption unless the speaker himself is willing to yield for a question; however, he must not digress from the subject under consideration, and he must never become personal in his remarks.⁶ A speaker who has been reprimanded for violation of the rules may not proceed without permission of the WM; and if a member is twice reprimanded, the WM may order him to leave the lodgeroom.⁷

It is not in the best interest of the Lodge to introduce an original motion, resolution, or proposition orally from the floor; and the WM is not obligated to accept it if so introduced.⁸ Such new business is best presented in writing, read aloud by the Secretary, and then referred by the WM to the proper committee for subsequent study and ultimate recommendation to the Lodge.⁹

A motion, when properly framed, is always in the affirmative—never in the negative.¹⁰

After a resolution or proposition has been submitted to a Committee or the motion has been presented to the Lodge by the WM, it cannot be withdrawn over objection unless the

Lodge votes to permit withdrawal.¹¹

When a resolution or proposition is ready for consideration, only the following motions are acceptable.¹²

- Postpone temporarily (not debatable)
- Postpone definitely
- Refer to a Committee
- Amend
- Adopt

The precedence of these motions is in the order listed above, the motion to adopt being, of the lowest ranks.¹³ Although they do not require a second, they may be seconded by the WM

Incidental motions to divide or to withdraw are also acceptable, but they require a second other than the WM¹

All questions of order are decided by the WM without debate and without appeal to the Lodge,³ however, the WM may seek the advice of any member before ruling. If the debate becomes acrimonious and threatens the peace and harmony of the Lodge, or if a member violates the proprieties of parliamentary and fraternal courtesies, the WM may rap the gavel, order the member to cease speaking and terminate debate.⁷

Article 336 states that “no order made, resolution adopted, or other vote on any business matter shall be reconsidered except at the same or next stated meeting of the Lodge, nor unless an equal or greater number of members are present than were present when the action was taken”. It is permissible, however, to amend, revoke, or rescind previous action at any subsequent stated meeting.

Since only those members previously listed are permitted in the Lodge, the following motions are never acceptable:¹⁴

- Adjourn
- Recess
- Vote immediately
- Limit debate
- Postpone indefinitely¹⁵

Furthermore, the Lodge cannot act as “a

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Committee of the Whole".¹⁶

Lodge meetings are of two types: "stated" and "called". A Stated Meeting is a regular meeting of the Lodge as provided in the by-laws; A Called Meeting is a any other meeting. Articles 234, 235, and 415 specify that all Lodge business must be voted upon at stated meetings only, except (a) the vote on proficiency in trial questions and answers, and (b) the vote to adopt proposed bylaws for a newly-chartered Lodge.¹⁷

The WM should be familiar with the prescribed manner of voting (whether by ballot or by show of hands); the percentage of votes required for adoption; (whether unanimous or lesser) and when the vote can be taken (whether at the meeting when proposed or at a subsequent meeting).¹⁸

It should be emphasized, however, that although knowledge of Grand Lodge Law and of parliamentary procedure is invaluable to the WM, it is not a substitute for good judgement and common sense. Some business items must be decided by the WM according to his own conscientious concept of what is right, not matter how urgently he is pressed to the contrary; otherwise, he is not worthily to occupy his station in the East. The Brethren should accept the decisions and rulings of the WM unless and until he is overruled by the Grand Master and / or the Grand Lodge in turn, the WM should so rule and govern the Lodge as to merit the admiration, the respect, and perhaps even the affection of his fellow Masons; thus, every Lodge meeting begun in order may be conducted in peace and closed in harmony.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. Incidental motions are:
 - a. Withdraw a motion under consideration.
 - b. Divide a motion under consideration.
2. When all Lodge members present are required to vote, the secrecy of the ballot remains absolute; this is especially important in balloting upon petitions for the degrees or for affiliation.
3. Only the Grand Master and/or the Grand Lodge can remove a Worshipful Master from office; the Blue Lodge itself cannot do so. The WM, therefore, is accountable to only the Grand Master and/or the Grand Lodge.
4. Although the WM is not required to do so, he would be well-advised to render his decisions in such a manner that no brother "loses face" or is made to feel "put down". A soft word of explanation from the WM may make all the difference. Perhaps the worst reply that could come from, the WM (when questioned about a ruling would be the curt comment, "Because I said so!"
5. Ordinarily, a rising Brother addresses the Lodge, "WM, Wardens, and Brethren", but when a Parliamentary item is under consideration, the rising Brother addresses only the WM.
6. Personalities must never, never, never, be any part of parliamentary discussion or debate; moreover, the WM must lower the favel in no uncertain terms if personalities are ever so introduced.
7. The WM must not permit any Brother to disrupt the peace and harmony of the Lodge.
8. The freedom and the license of the WM to accept or reject a proposed motion is not clearly understood by many Brethren; suffice it to say that the primary charge of the WM is to maintain order, peace, and harmony by whatever means he deems most appropriate.
9. When the Committee renders its report, it will prevent confusion if the report is written in the affirmative rather than the negative. See (10) below.
10. A motion framed in the negative invites chaos and confusion because the Brethren would be uncertain regarding the ultimate effect of their vote, be it "Aye" or "Nay", therefore, all motions should be framed in the affirmative.
11. When a proposed motion has been seconded, it no longer belongs to the proposer but to the lodge; consequently, only the Lodge can permit withdrawal of the motion.
12. a. The motion to postpone temporarily is also known as the motion to table. In most deliberative bodies this motion is used to kill the item under consideration. In the Blue Lodge, however, the correct purpose of this motion is to defer action temporarily, but if the WM suspects otherwise, he is not obligated to accept the motion.
 - b. The motion to postpone to a definite time is less offensive than the motion to postpone temporarily. (Table)
 - c. The motion to postpone indefinitely is never acceptable in Masonry because it infringes upon the immemorial right of the WM to conduct the affairs of the Lodge as the G/L Constitution and Ancient Charges require.
13. It is important that the WM respect the precedence of motions. Whenever a proposed motion is under consideration, a motion of higher rank may be accepted but a motion of lower rank cannot be accepted. The main motion "to adopt" is of the lowest rank. Next highest is the motion to amend, but not more than two amendments may be under consideration at any one time. When amendments to the main motion are proposed, they are voted on in reverse order, the second amendment being disposed of before the first amendment, then finally the main motion. The total number of amendments may be unlimited so long as not more than two are pending simultaneously.
14. Only the WM may decide when to adjourn, recess, vote or terminate debate.
15. See 12c
16. Only the WM "rules and governs" the Lodge and he cannot delegate this authority to the Lodge itself.
17. Obviously a newly-chartered Lodge must adopt by-laws at a special or called meeting.
18. The following references to Grand Lodge Constitution and Laws will be helpful to the Worshipful Master.

REFERENCES

Affiliation:

Title III: Chapter 7, Articles 386-390

Candidates:

Title IV: Chapter 1, Article 313, Chapter 2, Articles 415-420

Certificate of Dismissal for EA and FC

Title IV: Chapter 5, Article 446

Certificate of Good Standing

Title III: Chapter 7, Article 392

Consolidation of Lodges:

Title II: Chapter 8, Articles 245-253

Dimit:

Title III: Chapter 4, Articles 368-373

Election of Officers:

Title II: Chapter 16, Articles 290-294

Expulsion after three years suspension for non-payment of dues and reinstatement thereafter:

Title II: Chapter 18, Articles 326-327

Fixing dues above Grand Lodge minimum:

Title II: Chapter 17, Articles 308 & 311

Granting Life Membership:

Title II: Chapter 17, Article 315

Reinstatement after one-year suspension for non-payment of dues:

Title II: Chapter 18, Articles 324-325

Returning Lodge Charter:

Title II: Chapter 9, Articles 254 & 256

Vote on Proficiency:

Title IV: Chapter 4, Article 437

Waiver of Jurisdiction:

Title IV: Chapter 5, Articles 454, 456 & 459

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