

Your Job at Convention



Building On Our Successes
S'inspirer de nos succès

June 5-7 Juin Winnipeg 2025

cope**sepb**

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Welcome, COPE delegates!

*COPE conventions happen every three years and they are the supreme governing body of our union. **As a delegate representing your local, you will help determine our union's policies and direction for the coming years.***

Many new delegates find this guide helpful: explaining how our convention works, when and what are the key moments, how we make decisions and what your role is as a delegate. Your involvement and participation will mean a better convention and a stronger union, better able to serve all our members.

Thank you for taking part in this orientation and for accepting the obligation to represent your local union at this convention.

In solidarity,

*Annette Toth
President*

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Introduction

The foundation of the labour movement was built on the solidarity we have established between unions and union members. We have advanced our vision of a better, more equitable world and made considerable gains when we have maintained a united front.

Today, more than ever, we must have one voice that stands together against the social and economic injustices brought on by right-wing, anti-worker governments at home and abroad.

Convention is the constitutional decision-making body of our union. Delegates to convention have the important task of debating resolutions that set the policies and directions of our union.

This handbook has been prepared to assist you in representing your local union at convention and ensuring the best interests of all members of our union are considered in a fair and democratic forum.

Why We Hold Conventions

Union conventions are held to deal with union business. This business may include any or all of the following:

- i) constitutional changes
- ii) adoption of policy decisions
- iii) adoption of resolutions on external matters
- iv) changing the organization (this includes everything from minor “housekeeping” adjustments to major constitutional overhauls)
- v) financial matters for our national union

Conventions also provide opportunities for union members to meet with one another informally, to discuss common problems, to exchange views, to share experiences, and to interact socially.

Delegate Preparation

As a delegate, it is important that you are adequately prepared for the convention.

Ideally, you will come to convention fully informed on all the major issues to be dealt with. You will have discussed these issues fully at your local union. You will know the position of your local union on most major issues.

There are some exceptions to this role:

- i) In the event of “startling new evidence” turning up on a particular issue, your local may change its position.
- ii) If emergency resolutions are introduced, you will have to decide with other delegates from your local, how to vote at the convention, without conferring with your members.
- iii) On some issues, you may be given a mandate by your local union to decide on an issue at the convention itself. For example, you may be instructed by your local union to vote for candidates on the basis of their support or lack of support for certain key issues.

Policy Positions

When we are making policy decisions, we seek to adopt policies we can all live with-policies that reflect our desire to best represent our members’ interests and protect the important services they provide in communities every day.

For this reason, in the labour movement, we attempt to compromise and accommodate, and reflect wishes of the democratic majority.

However, if a compromise totally acceptable to all groups cannot be achieved, it is important that dissenting minorities should not undermine the democratic process by trying to force their positions on the union, by threatening to leave, or by using some other form of coercion.

Once the will of the majority is clear, everyone should support the particular policy in the interests of maintaining the union’s solidarity.

Rules of Order

Sample rule of order:

Reports of committees (including recommendations on resolutions) may not be amended from the floor.

However, a motion to refer a report, with instruction, back to the committee for reconsideration is in order.

A motion to refer is not debatable.

When a motion to refer is properly seconded, it must be put to a vote. A delegate may not move a motion to refer after speaking on an issue.

Chairperson's Rules of Order

Large meetings such as union conventions must be run according to agreed-upon rules.

Increasingly, awareness is growing that rules of order, if used improperly, can, and have been, used as a means of silencing voices, and are a product of colonialism. Until an alternative means of running meetings fairly is agreed upon, those enforcing the rules must be mindful of this history and experience.

These rules of order are designed to ensure that the business of the meeting is dealt with in a fair, just and efficient manner.

The constitution and by-laws of each organization outline the main rules of order, and in the Canadian labour movement these are usually based on *Bourinot's Rules of Order*. (Some organizations use *Robert's Rules of Order*, but the differences are minimal).

Usually, the rules of order used at conventions differ slightly from the rules of order used at other meetings. This is done to make allowances for the special circumstances under which conventions are held, such as the large numbers present.

The convention's rules of order are adopted at the start of the convention, after discussion and amendment, if required.

While all delegates are responsible for the orderly conduct of the meeting, the person in the chair helps set the tone. Delegates normally show the chairperson every consideration throughout the convention. Sitting in the chair is not an easy job when you are dealing with numerous issues and hundreds of delegates.

The chairperson will follow the rules of order in most cases; however, there will be times when they may see fit to be flexible with the rules or short-cut them: e.g., if the session is getting out of hand, if delegates are confused about a particular technicality, or if a matter needs to be expedited.

The fact that the chairperson has not strictly adhered to the rules of order should not be automatically a reason for delegates all over the hall to jump up with points of order, points of privilege or questions on the ruling of the chair.

Normally, the chair should be questioned only if the chairperson breaks the rules of order and creates a situation that is against the majority of the delegates' wishes at convention.

Chairperson's Role as Leader

The chairperson is responsible for the orderly conduct of the convention's business sessions, but as the chief elected officer, must also show political leadership. For example, a chairperson may decide to speak to a motion if it seems a decision may be taken that is not in the best interests of the organization.

Delegate's Role

Delegates are elected to represent their local unions at convention, and therefore should be active participants at convention. Delegates are not at convention to represent their individual views, but rather to represent the position of their local union.

It is important that you are in attendance during sessional hours, that you vote on resolutions, and that you clarify with your chair or delegates from your local/region issues that you do not fully understand before you vote.

Agenda

The agenda is adopted at the beginning of the convention. It establishes the order of business and the time to be spent on each item.

You should check the agenda carefully to ensure that time has been allowed for the discussion of all items which you consider important.

A carefully prepared agenda can help expedite the business of the convention.

For example, if time limits are set:

- i) delegates will be encouraged to discuss the matter thoroughly before they ever arrive at the convention, and thus resolve as many problems as possible in advance;
- ii) delegates who speak will be less likely to stray from the point or waste time on matters of little or no consequence.

Resolutions

Preamble and motion

Resolutions usually consist of two parts- a **preamble** and **motion**.

The **preamble** is the “why” part of the resolution. It usually consists of a paragraph or series of paragraphs beginning with the word “Whereas”. These paragraphs give the justification for, or explanation of, the resolution.

The **motion** is the “what” part of the resolution. It usually consists of a paragraph or paragraphs beginning with the words “Be it resolved”. It is the policy proposal part of the resolution.

The preamble is optional, but all resolutions must include a motion.

An example

Preamble:

Whereas smoking is a habit which many find offensive, and

Whereas a positive connection has been established between smoking and lung cancer, and

Whereas many people who smoke would like to stop, but it difficult to break the habit,

Motion:

Be it resolved that the union allot from general funds \$150. to the Smokers Anonymous Club to help union members to stop smoking.

Resolutions Committee

The purpose of the Resolutions Committee is to coordinate the business of the convention.

Members of the committee do this in some or all of the following ways:

- they correct spelling mistakes and grammatical errors in the resolutions submitted;
- they combine similar resolutions (e.g. called a “composite resolution”);
- they determine the order in which the resolutions are to be considered, giving priority to the most important resolutions;
- they separate the resolutions into categories (e.g., resolutions on human rights, education, social issues).

Resolutions

A delegate who wishes to speak at a microphone IN FAVOUR of a committee recommendation would go to a “PRO” mic; a delegate who wishes to speak AGAINST a committee recommendation would go to a “CON” mic. Each speaker has a maximum of **three** minutes.

When local unions vote, you simply vote in FAVOUR or AGAINST the resolution.

Convention Committees

Along with the Resolutions Committee, the Constitution and other committees are appointed to help speed up the business of convention. These committees may include:

Credentials Committee, which keeps a record of the number of registered delegates and ensures that only those with valid credentials vote.

Sgt. at Arms Committee, which checks delegates at the door to ensure they have the proper credentials, distributes information on the floor, and assists with other convention duties.

Reports

At convention, reports may be tabled by union officers and the CEC.

After each report has been presented, the presenter will move its adoption, which will then need to be seconded.

If Convention votes in favour of adoption, it is accepting all policy proposals and recommendations made in the report.

If the Convention is not prepared to accept the proposals and recommendations, it will usually refer the report back to the committee for further consideration.

Under normal circumstances, a report is not amended on the convention floor unless the change is a minor one (e.g., correcting a grammatical mistake) and done with the consent of the committee.

Voting

The members of our national union are locals. As such, voting rights are extended to locals as per article 6 of our national constitution. Local unions decide how their votes are to be cast in accordance with the position taken by the local union, and the assignment of voting rights amongst that local's delegates or delegate.

Voting on resolutions or reports is done by a show of hands or a standing vote.

The show of hands is a speedy, efficient way of voting. Usually, it is not even necessary to count the hands since the will of the majority can be judged at a glance. Where the vote is unclear, a roll call vote may be called whereby delegates stand to indicate how their local is casting its voting strength.

Local unions have usually committed themselves one way or the other before the vote and have been lobbying for their position on the particular issue in question. Delegates are representing their locals, not themselves. Therefore, except in the case of voting for Officers of the National Executive, in the interests of transparency and accountability, it is important that secret ballots be avoided.

Conclusion

The motion to adjourn will occur on the last day of convention, and the delegates leave for home. Although the convention is now over, delegates still have a great deal of work to do.

When you get back to your local union, you must explain what happened at convention, what decisions were taken, and what new directions were chosen. You must ensure that your union does in fact put into effect the policies which were decided on at convention. Working on your own and with other stewards at your worksite(s) or through executives, bargaining teams and committees (e.g. health and safety, education, membership), you will help to ensure that the policy decisions made at convention are implemented.

Together with other union members, we will be working together to bring these policies into effect. We will be working toward creating improved economic, social and political conditions for yourselves, for all other workers, and for the disadvantaged throughout society.