



your job
@ convention
47th BCGEU Constitutional Convention

Welcome, BCGEU delegates!

OUR CONVENTION is the highest governing body of our organization and the cornerstone of union democracy. Convention delegates determine BCGEU's policies and direction.

This guide is designed to show you how conventions work. Our goal is to help you become more involved and assist you in participating fully as a new delegate. Your involvement and participation will mean a better convention and a stronger union, better able to serve all of our members.

Thank you for taking part in this orientation and for accepting the obligation to represent other members at this policy convention.

In solidarity,

*George Heyman
President*

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Introduction



SOLIDARITY has traditionally been the key to union success. At the opening of the policy convention, delegates sing “Solidarity Forever” following the Call to Order by the president.

This traditional labour anthem reflects the need for all of us to stand united in our struggles and our vision of creating a better world for people. The strength of our union lies in the solidarity of our large and diverse membership.

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 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 the Campbell Liberal government.

Delegates to the policy 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 members at the 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) Election of officers.
- ii) Constitutional changes.
- iii) Adoption of policy decisions.
- iv) Adoption of resolutions on external matters.
- v) Changing the organization. (This includes everything from minor “housekeeping” adjustments to major constitutional overhauls.)

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.

At this convention, delegates will deal primarily with resolutions on issues and any resolutions dealing with changes to the union’s constitution. As this is a constitutional convention, elections will be held for the position of President, Secretary-Treasurer and 4 Vice-Presidents – 2 of which must be women.

Delegate preparation



Policy positions

AS A DELEGATE, it is important that you are adequately prepared for the policy convention.

Ideally, you will come to the policy convention fully informed on all the major issues to be dealt with. You will have discussed these issues fully within your local and component, and with the members you represent. You will know which way you are going to vote on most major issues.

There are some exceptions to this rule:

- i) In the event of “startling new evidence” turning up on a particular issue, you may change your vote.
- ii) If emergency resolutions are introduced, you will have to decide how to vote at the policy convention, without conferring with your members.
- iii) On some issues, you may be given a mandate by your members to decide on an issue at the policy convention itself.

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 the 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 position on the union, by threatening to leave, or by using some other form of blackmail.

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

Delegates should not abuse the rules. They should not use them to force groups into unwelcome positions, to force issues through too quickly, to slow down the business unnecessarily, or to undermine the union or the solidarity of the delegates.

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. The BCGEU uses Robert's Rules of Order Revised.)

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.

THE PERSON in the chair is responsible for the orderly conduct of the convention.

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 he/she 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



Delegate's role

Agenda

THE CHAIRPERSON is responsible for the orderly conduct of the convention's business sessions. Generally the chair is also a senior elected leader of the union, and as such she or he must also show leadership. For example, the 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.

If the chairperson is to make a speech, it is customary for the chair to be handed over to another union officer.

DELEGATES are elected to represent their members at convention, and therefore should be active participants at convention.

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 component issues that you do not fully understand before you vote.

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

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 Committee

OUR FORMAT for resolutions has changed to a plain language approach. The goal is to make it easier for all delegates to understand what the union is being asked to do, and why the author of the motion thinks it is important for the union to take a stand or action.

Resolutions will still have two parts.

The first part clearly and simply spells out what action or stand our union will commit to.

The second part is the **why** or **rationale** of the motion, and always starts with **because**.

A PLAIN LANGUAGE EXAMPLE

Action: BCGEU **will** strongly encourage locals to establish mentor and buddy systems for stewards and occupational health and safety committee members in new union certifications.

Why: **Because** members and activists in new certifications need support and are

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);
- They recommend concurrence or non-concurrence on each of the resolutions.

One of the main functions of the Resolutions Committee is to recommend concurrence or non-concurrence on resolutions.

When delegates vote, they vote on the committee's recommendation, not on the resolution itself. This sometimes leads to confusion.

The following table simplifies the problem by showing how a delegate will vote under each of the four possible situations.

COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION	DELEGATE'S ATTITUDE	DELEGATE WILL VOTE
CONCURRENCE	AGREES with resolution	IN FAVOUR of recommendation
	DISAGREES with resolution	AGAINST recommendation
NON-CONCURRENCE	AGREES with resolution	AGAINST recommendation
	DISAGREES with resolution	IN FAVOUR of recommendation

A delegate who wishes to speak at a microphone IN FAVOUR of a committee recommendation would go to a "PRO" mike; a delegate who wishes to speak AGAINST a committee recommendation would go to a "CON" mike. Each speaker has a maximum of four minutes.

ALONG WITH the Resolutions Committee, other committees are appointed to help speed up the business of the policy 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.

Convention Committees

Reports

AT CONVENTION, reports may be tabled by union officers and by standing committees such as the Education, Activism and Communications Committee, Community and Social Action Committee and Finance Committee.

After each report has been presented, the chairperson of the committee will move its adoption, which is then usually seconded by the secretary of the committee.

If the delegates vote in favour of adoption, they are accepting all policy proposals and recommendations made in the report.

If the delegates are not prepared to accept the proposals and recommendations, they 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.)

Voting



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.

Delegates 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. Therefore, it does not matter that the vote is not secret.

The show of hands also has a psychological advantage in giving those present concrete evidence of solidarity on the issue. If the outcome of the vote by show of hands is too close to call, a standing vote may be requested.

Here's how it works. First, the chairperson will call on the Sgt. at Arms Committee to be ready to count the vote. Next, the chair will ask all those in favour of the motion to stand. Sgt. at Arms Committee members will circulate through the convention hall and count the number of people standing.

Once your vote is counted, you will be asked to sit down. The process is then repeated for those opposed to the motion and those abstaining. The Sgt. at Arms Committee tabulates the overall result, and reports it to the Chair, who then announces the outcome to delegates.

Conclusion



THE MOTION to adjourn will occur on the last day of the policy convention. But before the motion to adjourn is accepted, the practise is that any unfinished resolutions will be referred by motion to the Provincial Executive. This is to ensure that important issues raised by locals can still be dealt with.

The Executive is empowered to deal with these resolutions. Delegates and members are kept informed of these decisions through the BCGEU website, www.bcgeu.ca.

Once the the motion to adjourn is adopted, 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, you must explain to the members what happened at the policy 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 towards creating improved economic, social and political conditions for yourselves, for all other workers, and for the disadvantaged throughout society.