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# WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVE GUILD.

## PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO RULES.

*Issued by the Central Committee, January, 1921.*



### I.—THE GENERAL SECRETARYSHIP.

At our next Congress at Manchester in June, the Guild will be called on to make some very important decisions affecting the future of Guild organisation. Among these are (a) whether the General Secretary shall become a paid officer (which was thoroughly discussed last year); and (b) the method of appointment of a paid General Secretary.

Hitherto the post has been unpaid, but as explained in the paper "Guild Finances" the position of the Guild is now such that it has become practically impossible for the work to be done voluntarily by any new General Secretary.

Under our present rules, the General Secretary is nominated and elected by a vote of all the branches. But, as a matter of fact, no choice has been exercised, as there has only been one candidate. The objections to retaining this simple method when a new appointment of a paid secretary becomes necessary are:—

- (a) That the majority of the branches would know little or nothing about the candidates from other sections, and would not therefore be in a position to exercise a reasoned choice. They would probably vote for some one from their own section, because they know her, while there might be far more suitable candidates amongst those they did not know. A considerable number of branches might have practically no knowledge of any of the candidates at all.
- (b) That a candidate from one of the smaller sections would be handicapped even if she were the best for the post because she would be known to only a few branches.
- (c) The kind of knowledge which branches can get through hearing an address, or a speech in discussion at a conference, is not a safe guide as to the suitability of a candidate for the varied and specialised work of the General Secretary.

The method of simple election is hardly ever adopted in the Co-operative Movement, but is common in the Trade Unions, where, however, the voting is done by the individual members, not by branches. It should be borne in mind, however, that Trade Unions are much less sectionalised than the Guild, and many more officials are known to all the union branches. These officials are also known not merely as speakers, but by their action in conducting negotiations and strikes, which gives more opportunity for judging their fitness for such a post as that of General Secretary.



*Alternative Methods.*

For these reasons it seems necessary to alter the present method of electing the General Secretary, and we put forward for discussion two alternative proposals:—

- (1) Selection by the Central Committee and Election by the Branches.
- (2) Appointment by the Central Committee.

In both schemes the Central Committee would have the power of removal.

The advantages of either of these methods are:—

- (a) The Central Committee know the work of the General Secretary better than any one, and are, therefore, in a better position to recommend or appoint the most suitable and competent person.
- (b) The Central Committee represent every section, and, therefore, candidates from each section, large or small, would have equal consideration.
- (c) The Central Committee alone know whether the work is being done properly, and can, therefore, best judge as to removal. If the removal were placed in the hands of Branches a public statement of the reasons for it would be required. This might be a delicate matter and damaging to the secretary. It might also entail a considerable period when there would be no secretary.
- (d) The General Secretary would be placed in a businesslike relation with the Central Committee, with whom she has to work, and to whose views she must finally conform.

**1. Selection by the Central Committee and Election by Branches.**

One method would be that the Central Committee should select and the branches should vote.

This arrangement would work out as follows:—

- (1) The post would be advertised in the Co-operative Press, and a copy of the advertisement would be sent to every branch, so that they could inform all their members, and application for the post could be made by any individual desiring to do so.
- (2) The Central Committee would receive the applications and act as a Committee of Selection, considering qualifications, etc., and would select the most suitable candidates.
- (3) The names of the selected candidates in order of suitability would be sent to the branches, and the branches would vote as to which should be elected.
- (4) The election would be by alternative vote. (See Note, p. 3.)
- (5) The appointment would be permanent, the Central Committee having the power of removal.
- (6) The General Secretary would be entitled to attend all meetings of the Central Committee, but not to vote.

The argument for this method is that it gives branches a direct voice in the choice of the General Secretary, creating interest and a sense of responsibility.

The argument against it is that sectional feeling, or self-advertisement, might prove stronger than consideration of who is the best person for the post.

**2. Appointment by the Central Committee.**

Another plan would be to place the appointment of the General Secretary in the hands of the Central Committee. This method could be arranged in the following manner:—

- (1) The post would be advertised in the Co-operative Press, and a copy of the advertisement would be sent to every branch, so that they could inform all their members, and application for the post could be made by any individual desiring to do so.
- (2) The appointment would be permanent, the Central Committee having the power of removal.
- (3) The General Secretary would be entitled to attend all meetings of the Central Committee, but not to vote.

The argument for this method is that the Central Committee, who know the work of a General Secretary as no one else can, make the final appointment.

The argument against this proposal is that the branches would only have an indirect voice in the appointment. They would act through their elected representatives, the Central Committee. It must be remembered, however, that the three years' time limit keeps the Central Committee in very close touch with the branches.

The method of appointment by the Executive is almost universal in the Co-operative Movement. It is the method adopted in the Co-operative Union, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and in nearly all Co-operative Societies. The National Union of Teachers also adopts this method.

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Under either of these two methods, provision must be made for the case of Central Committee members standing as candidates for the General Secretaryship.

It is suggested that any Central Committee member applying for the post of General Secretary should previously retire from the Central Committee for the remainder of the year. (See section II., p. 4.)

**NOTE.****THE ALTERNATIVE VOTE.**

For important offices, it is very desirable that the candidate elected should have a clear majority of the votes recorded. This is secured if there are only two candidates, because the one elected will be the one who receives more than half the votes recorded.



If, however, there are three or more candidates for one office, very often none of them receives half the number of votes. If there are four candidates, for instance

"A"	may receive	400	votes
"B"	"	300	"
"C"	"	200	"
"D"	"	100	"

This shows that 1,000 votes were recorded, but "A" has only received 400 votes, while 600 have been recorded for other candidates. So that only a minority have voted for "A."

One way to secure a definite majority is to take a second vote between the two highest candidates, "A" and "B." But this is very cumbersome, and the same result is obtained by the Alternative Vote.

The broad outline of the system of the Alternative Vote is as follows:—

When the voting takes place each Branch puts 1 against the candidate it prefers (called its first Preference Vote), 2 against its second choice candidate (called its second Preference Vote), 3 against its third choice (called its third Preference Vote) and so on.

When the votes are counted the first preference votes are counted first, with the result given in the table above. Then the two lowest candidates "C" and "D" drop out. The voting papers giving them first preference votes are gone through again, so that the second preference votes on these papers may be counted with the following results:—

On "C's" papers the second Preference Votes are

"A"	40
"B"	150
"D"	10

On "D's" papers the second Preference Votes are

"A"	10
"B"	70
"C"	20

The second preference votes for "A" (50) and "B" (220) are added to their first preference votes, so that "B" receives altogether 520 votes, and "A" 450 votes.

As "C" and "D" have dropped out, the 30 second preference votes given to them do not count at all, and the third preference votes on these papers are now counted. These are 20 for "A" and 10 for "B." These are added to the total already counted, making "B's" votes 530 and "A's" votes 470. Therefore "B" is elected by a clear majority.

If there had been a fresh election between "A" and "B," it is obvious that all branches which gave their second choice to "B" would have voted for "B," and similarly in the case of "A." Therefore, the result of a second election and of the Alternative Vote is the same.

An advantage of adopting this system is that either the Alternative Vote or Proportional Representation (in which the method of voting is the same) is likely before long to be adopted for Parliamentary Elections. It would be useful, therefore, if our members gained experience in this system in the Guild.

## II.—FILLING VACANCIES ON THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

The present rule is as follows:—

"If a vacancy occurs on the Central Committee during the year, it shall be filled by the defeated candidate receiving the highest number of votes in the section in which the vacancy

occurs; or if there be no such candidate, by the council member in that section who received the highest number of votes."

Very constantly the only candidates standing against the Central Committee member eligible for re-election are quite unknown people who only receive a very few votes. For instance, one year the candidate elected received over 100 votes, and her opponent two votes. It is obvious that this defeated candidate would not in any sense have represented the branches in that section if a vacancy had occurred.

The Central Committee recommend that the present rule should be deleted, and that a new rule should be inserted by which a fresh election would take place if the vacancy occurred in the first nine months after Congress. If it occurred later, the vacancy would not be filled, but the Secretary of the Section would attend the Central Committee meetings until the new Central Committee was elected.

They also recommend a similar rule in the case of a vacancy in (1) a Council, or (2) a sectional secretaryship. At present there is no rule for filling a vacancy in a sectional secretaryship.

# THE ANNUAL CONGRESS.

## I.—THE NUMBER OF DELEGATES AT CONGRESS.

An organisation of the size of the Women's Co-operative Guild, with nearly 50,000 members, demands that its Annual Congress shall maintain its reputation of being a business-like assembly dealing in an efficient manner with all the subjects on its agenda. Owing to the rapid growth of the Guild in the last two years, this has become almost an impossibility with a Congress constituted under the present rules, for the number of delegates attending means that the Congress is much too large for the efficient conduct of business.

At Derby, in June, 1920, about 1,250 delegates were present, and the hall was so overcrowded that many delegates were unable to hear properly. This state of things must inevitably lead to misunderstandings and disorder, and it seems the time has come to reconsider the rules dealing with the representation at Congress, especially as since Derby Congress 100 new branches have already been formed. Many districts have other branches in process of formation, and on the present basis it seems probable that future Congresses will be attended by upwards of 1,500 delegates. Few towns have halls which will accommodate so large a meeting, and fewer still have halls suitable for Congress discussions by so large a number of delegates.

It has, therefore, become essential to the business-like conduct of Congress that the number of delegates attending Congress should be limited. Our experience shows that about 800 is the limit of size for an efficient Congress.

Various suggestions have been made, such as limiting representation to two delegates from each branch, or allowing one delegate for every



50 members. But the first would hardly reduce the numbers at all, and the second would mean, even now, over 1,000 delegates. The only method of securing a reasonable sized Congress is to make the basis of representation one delegate for every branch of 100 members or less. This would mean that 700 to 800 branches would be entitled to send one delegate each; 80 to 90 branches two delegates each; about twelve branches three delegates each; and about three branches four to six delegates each.

If three-fourths of our branches sent delegates (the proportion which sent to Derby) this would mean a Congress of about 750 delegates, which would allow of some expansion due to increase in the number of branches in the next few years.

One objection to this limitation will be that branches like to send two delegates for company. But under our present system, the weaker and more isolated branches with a small membership, whose members are most shy of coming alone, can only send one delegate, and actually 76 branches sent only one delegate each to Derby. Now that there are often several branches in connection with the same society, the delegates would know each other and could arrange to go together. In other cases, District Secretaries might arrange for the delegates from the branches in their district to travel and stay together.

## II.—METHODS OF VOTING AT CONGRESS.

The question now arises whether the basis of voting should be altered at the same time as the basis of representation at Congress. If we adopt the system of one delegate for every 100 or less members, we can either give one vote to each delegate (which is our present rule) or a system of card voting can be adopted. Let us deal with card voting first.

### *Card Voting.*

At the Derby Annual Congress an amendment to rule was proposed to introduce Card Voting, so that if a branch only sent one or two delegates, those delegates could exercise the full voting power of the branch. This amendment was referred back for discussion.

The method adopted of arranging Card Voting is to supply each branch with a card or cards representing the number of votes to which it is entitled. Two ways of giving these cards are possible.

1. Only one card may be sent representing the full number of votes. If a branch has 85 members, it has four votes under the present system of one vote for every 25 members, and a card with 4 printed on it would be sent to the Branch Secretary. If the branch was sending three delegates, it would have to decide which one should have the voting card, and whenever a card vote was taken (which would be when there was close division of opinion) that delegate alone would vote, while the other two would not be able to do so.

2. One card for each vote might be sent to the branch. In this case four cards would be sent, and the branch would have to decide how the cards were distributed to the three delegates.

### *Should there be Card Voting?*

The argument in favour of Card Voting is that it is desirable that the voting at Congress should exactly represent the views of the majority of the members, and that this requires that the full voting power of each branch should be exercised at Congress, even though only one delegate is sent.

On the other hand, there are certain objections and difficulties which require the very careful consideration of Guild Branches.

It should first be understood that it is very difficult to count Card Votes in a large Congress where the Tellers cannot walk between each row. To do it accurately the Tellers should be experienced in the work, and in the Co-operative Congress the permanent paid staff of the Co-operative Union act as Tellers each year. In our Congress, however, fresh Tellers are appointed by each Congress.

Apart from this technical difficulty, which is a serious one, because fear of inaccurate counting makes friction at Congress, the whole question whether it is desirable to have Card Voting in an organisation like the Guild, must be dealt with.

Card Voting is adopted in Congresses of organisations to which separate societies are affiliated which vary very much in numbers. The two chief congresses where it exists are the Co-operative Union Congress (consisting of Co-operative Societies whose membership varies from under 100 to 100,000) and the Trades Union Congress (consisting of Trade Unions whose membership varies from under 5,000 to over 600,000). It is these great differences in size which have led to the adoption of the Card Vote. And the result is not by any means felt to be fully satisfactory, because a few big societies can carry the vote.

A plan which avoids Card Voting is that adopted by the National Union of Railwaymen, in which the branches are grouped so as to secure approximately equal numbers in each group, which appoints one delegate. The Executive groups the branches every three years. In this way equal representation is secured, and the number of delegates to the annual meeting can be kept within such limits that the delegate meeting is not too large for the effective conduct of business.

In the Guild our branches have no such variations in size as there are in the size of Co-operative Societies and Trade Unions. More than half of our branches have from 26 to 75 members and only 98 have over 100 members. The ordinary basis of votes in large organisations is one vote for every 1,000 members. We believe no organisation except the Guild provides for so low a basis as one vote for every 25 members. This was adopted 30 years ago when our numbers were very low. Now that the Guild has grown so much it seems most desirable to alter the basis of our votes from the present very low standard. If this is done and the same basis is adopted for both representation and voting, the reasons for Card Voting would disappear. The vast majority of branches have under 100 members. Each of these would be entitled to one vote and able to send one delegate.



The large branches with over 100 members could well afford to send their extra number of delegates (each of whom would have one vote) and so exercise their additional voting power.

Again, Card Voting implies that delegates are definitely instructed how to vote on every resolution before Congress. But this is neither possible nor desirable. Most branches very wisely give their delegates freedom on many of the questions, leaving them to decide after hearing the discussion at Congress. The object of Congress is to enable delegates to put all the different points of view and obtain explanation of doubtful matters. But if their votes were rigidly fixed on all subjects beforehand the value or reality of the Congress discussions would be destroyed.

*One Delegate One Vote.*

In view of the difficulties and disadvantages of Card Voting, the method of One Delegate One Vote seems most satisfactory.

If it were possible to adopt the method of grouping branches, as is done by Trade Unions, so that each delegate represented an equal number of members, the question of any other method would not arise. But our branches are accustomed to appointing their own delegates, and would not like to give this up. Also, there is a great advantage in each branch being directly interested in Congress, by being responsible for sending a delegate, who reports direct to them, and whom they can instruct as they desire.

The variation in the size of branches is, however, so small comparatively (more than half having from 26 to 75 members), that practical equality would be obtained by raising the basis for representation at Congress, and adopting the same basis for voting.

The question of the voting power at Congress is linked up with the voting power in elections. According to our present rules, the voting power of each branch in the elections of Central Committee and Sectional Councils is the same as their representation at Congress. A different basis would be confusing to branches and entail a considerable amount of extra work at the Central Office.

The Central Committee therefore recommend :—

**1. That the representation of branches at Congress should be one delegate for every 100 members, or fraction of 100 members. Every branch with 100 members or less would be entitled to send one delegate, branches with 101 to 200 delegates could send two delegates, and so on.**

**2. That the voting at Congress should be on the same basis, each delegate having one vote.**

**3. That the voting in elections of Central Committee, General Secretary, Sectional Council and Sectional Secretaries should be on the same basis**

**To be obtained, price 2d., from the Women's Co-operative Guild, 28, Church Row, Hampstead, London, N.W. 3**