

Democracy at Work

The word Democracy (from *Demos* - people and *Kratos* - power) was coined by the ancient Greeks. This form of democracy gave the vote to males of good parentage who had served their term in the army and were of mature age. (Some regions thought that age was 30 years.)

Likewise, the small percentage of men who were Romans citizens elected their Senate. Those running for office were called Candidates because while campaigning they would wear white togas. (*Candida* = white in Latin) Once elected they would add a purple stripe to the hem.

The Magna Carta is hailed as a landmark in the development of English democracy even though it involved only the Barons and the King, not the ordinary Briton; but it was a start.

In many Grand Jurisdictions, only Master Masons are allowed to vote on matters affecting their lodge, but in Ontario all members have that franchise. From the day of his initiation a Mason may offer his opinion on matters of the governance of his lodge and vote in all resolutions, including the election of the lodge's Master and Wardens.

A small group, such as a lodge, can govern itself by assembling the membership and holding a vote. Once an organization gets to be a certain size, and spread over a large enough area, this becomes impractical. Over the centuries a system evolved in Britain whereby the people from each area (or riding) would elect one person as their representative to vote on their behalf in the Parliament.

At the very first annual communication of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, all Masons of the founding lodges were summoned. According to Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*: "The four old lodges then agreed to extend their patronage to every new lodge which should hereafter be constituted according to the new regulations of the Society; and while they acted in conformity to the ancient constitutions of the order, to admit their Masters and Wardens to share with them all the privileges of the Grand Lodge, excepting precedence of rank. Matters being thus amicably adjusted, the brethren of the four old Lodges considered their attendance on the future Communication of the Society as unnecessary, and, therefore, like the other Lodges, trusted implicitly to their Master and Wardens, resting satisfied that no measure of importance would ever be adopted without their approbation." (1)

So it is in our Grand Lodge today. The Master and Wardens vote on behalf of their lodge at the Annual Communication. This is why, should one or two of them be absent, one of the others votes for them and each lodge gets three votes. If all three are absent, a proxy delegated by the lodge exercises the three votes.

Ever since the Union of the Antients and Moderns in England in 1813, Past Masters have also gotten a vote. In the Articles of Union it is distinctly specified that "Past Masters of Lodges, who have regularly served and passed the chair before the day of Union, and have continued, without secession, to be regular contributing members of a warranted Lodge, are ex officio members of Grand Lodge. It being understood that of all Masters who, from and after the day of the said Union, shall regularly pass the chair of their respective Lodges, but one at a time, to be delegated by his Lodge, shall have a right to sit and vote in the said Grand Lodge." (2)

Compared to other Grand Jurisdictions around the world our system is very open. In some areas, only the Grand Master is elected. He then appoints all the other Grand Lodge officers, including all the DDGMs! And under a traditional Grand Orient, the Grand Council appoints the Grand Master. The Grand Council also appoints new members to itself. It is a self-contained system with no input from the ordinary Mason.

In our Grand Jurisdiction, our delegates vote for a Grand Master and a Deputy Grand Master every two years. They vote for Grand Secretary and Grand Treasurer on the alternate years. And every year they elect seven members to the Board, each for a two year term, which makes fourteen elected Board members at any given time. The delegates elect the Grand Wardens and Grand Registrar each year. And they also vote on resolutions and Constitutional amendments during the Annual Communication.

The voting for the officers of Grand Lodge occurs at the Annual Communication, which is held the third week of July in Toronto. The polls are open on the Tuesday evening from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm and the Wednesday from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. You proceed to the Concert Hall, which is on the Convention Floor, at the opposite end of the corridor from where the Grand Lodge meeting is held. You register by giving your name and your lodge name and number. If you belong to more than one lodge you can choose which lodge you wish to represent when registering, unless you are a Master or Warden, in which case you must register under the lodge of which you are presently a senior officer. (This maintains the three votes per lodge.) If you belong to lodges in two districts you can only vote for the DDGM in the district under which you have registered.

On registering you will be given a very complex ballot form. The colour will depend on how many votes you are carrying. On one side there are boxes to check for your choice for Grand Senior Warden, Grand Junior Warden, and Grand Registrar. Depending on the year there may also be boxes to vote for the Grand Secretary and Grand Treasurer, or to write in the name of your choice for Grand Master and Deputy Grand Master. The ballots for Grand Master and DGM are write-in ballots, so you'd better find out who is running before you enter the Hall as their names are not necessarily on the list you are given with your ballot.

On the other side of the page are the brethren running for the Board of General Purposes. Seven are to be elected and you must vote for seven. Not six, not eight. If you vote for the wrong number, your ballot will be rejected. This is because of mathematics. If a significant number were to vote for only one candidate, it could skew the results. (Try this at home with a sample size of ten ballots. Mark only one candidate on half of them and seven on the rest - you'll see how it works.)

You then take the ballot to the box, where they tear off a strip from the side of the ballot and give it back to you. Don't throw this away! You may need it later.

It may be used to elect your DDGM, or if there is a run-off vote for Grand Master, DGM, Grand Secretary or Grand Treasurer. This would be announced and done at the District meetings on Wednesday afternoon.

Your District will meet at either 4:00 pm or 5:00 pm on the Wednesday. One of the items on the agenda will be the election of the District Deputy Grand Master. Whatever the formal or informal method your District follows for choosing a new DDGM, the official election that really counts happens at this meeting.

If you are one of those entrusted by your lodge to exercise this important function, there are several opportunities to inform yourself before casting a ballot. With your ballot you are given a sheet with a small amount of information about each candidate. But waiting till then doesn't really give you much time to think about your choice. Your lodge's Secretary has been sent copies of this in advance, so ask him for it. During the next month, the candidates will be visiting a lot of lodges. Some Districts also have "meet the candidates" events. Go to them. Talk to those who are running. Ask them their opinions on various issues. They'd love to have the opportunity to talk to you.

And on the Tuesday of the Annual Communication (after the education seminars, which you won't want to miss) the candidates will all gather in Salon A on the Convention Floor from 6:30 to 8:30 pm so you can meet and interview them.

Take advantage of your lodge's franchise!

References

1. Preston, W., *Illustrations of Masonry*, 1772
2. Oliver, G.; *Institutes of Masonic Jurisprudence*, Spencer's, London, 1874

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Please share this Bulletin with the members of your Lodge, District and any other Masons you wish.