

The LOCAL 1245 Union Primer

Part 3

Units

OUR UNION'S MEETINGS AND THE PEOPLE WHO RUN THEM

From its earliest days Local 1245 was a large union spread out over a vast territory. Units were created by the founders to knit the union together. Our units have been an on-going exercise in democracy ever since.

Units are the union's ultimate source of strength—the place where unity is forged one meeting at a time. Units are also the starting place for individual members to exert their power. Units provide each member a way to influence union policy, approve or disapprove union initiatives, and nominate leaders.

In June of this year, all 102 units of IBEW Local 1245 will elect unit officers (except for five bi-monthly units that don't meet in June and will have to schedule a different time). If you've been a member-in-good-standing for six months at the time of the election, you are eligible to run for Unit Chair, Vice Chair or Recorder. Maybe you've even been considering it, but you're not sure what's involved.

The following story, adapted from an essay written by former Executive Board member James Wilburn in 2005, gives an overview of unit meetings and how they are conducted. Check it out. Maybe this is the year you make your mark as a unit officer!

A labor union cannot be effective unless it has informed members who know how to participate. Unit meetings offer members a way to learn what is going on, and also a way to express their views. Local 1245 has a set of rules to keep meetings orderly, and to assure that members' rights are respected. Each unit has its own traditions in the way unit meetings are conducted, but it is the responsibility of the unit officers to use the rules to maintain order and protect the rights of the members.

Unit meetings use parliamentary procedure, a common approach that assures everyone's rights are respected. *Robert's Rules of Order* is the basic handbook of parliamentary procedure, and Local 1245 units use a variation on these rules as follows:

1. Opening
2. Roll Call of Officers and Approval of Minutes
3. Communications and Bills
4. Reports of Executive Board and Officers
5. Propositions for Membership
6. Reports of Candidates
7. Balloting and Voting for Candidates
8. Obligation of Candidates
9. Reports of Business Manager, Delegates and Committees
10. Reports of Accidents, Sickness, or Death of Members
11. Unfinished Business
12. New Business
13. Good of the Union
14. Closing.

OPENING

"I respectfully request for the efficient management of business that you give undivided attention to all matters legally brought before you. I now declare this meeting of IBEW open for all business legally presented."

This is how Local 1245 meetings begin. Members are to pay attention. Business must be presented in a legal *manner*. Put simply, the chair asks the members to follow the rules.

The members have now become a *deliberative assembly*—a gathering of people to conduct the assembly's business. Members present ideas courteously. Others listen respectfully.

OK, maybe this doesn't exactly describe *your* unit meeting. Sometimes you can hear music from the bar in the next room. Sometimes members make wisecracks and rib each other during the meeting. And when the pizzas arrive, business can simply fall apart for a few minutes.

But the basic idea still holds true: you're there for a purpose. You discuss topics one at a time, in the proper order. After the catcalls and joking subsides, when the appropriate time comes, each member gets a chance to speak. The minority is heard. And, when votes are needed, the majority prevails. *That's* a deliberative assembly.

ROLL CALL OF OFFICERS AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

First, it is established that the officers are present. The unit chair must declare that a *quorum* is present. A quorum is the least number of members present required to conduct business legally. In most cases this is 7 members, though in some locations it is 5.

At the chair's invitation, the notes of previous meeting ("the minutes") are read by the recorder. The minutes become an official record of the unit's meetings, so it is important that members view them as accurate. The chair asks, "Are there any corrections or additions to the minutes?" If there is no response, the chair may say, "Hearing no corrections, the minutes are approved as read." This method is called "unanimous consent."

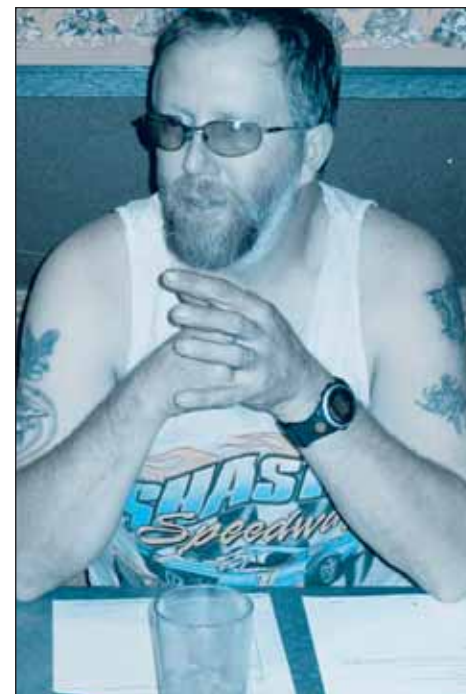
On the other hand, if members make corrections to the minutes, they are noted by the recorder. When there are no more corrections, the chair may say, "Hearing no further corrections, the minutes are approved as corrected."

COMMUNICATIONS AND BILLS

Local units of IBEW 1245 seldom use this heading. The Executive Board handles most communications and bills, although units control small amounts of money in their unit fund. Expenditures can be reported on at this time.



Betty Magnoli, left is record for Unit 2319, Mirant. Ricky Ricard, right, is chair.



Virgil O'Neil is Record for Unit 4419, Redding/Davey Tree.

REPORTS OF EXECUTIVE BOARD AND OFFICERS

At this time, members consider the report from the previous month's Local 1245 Executive Board meeting. The report may be read aloud, or simply passed around for members to read as the meeting continues.

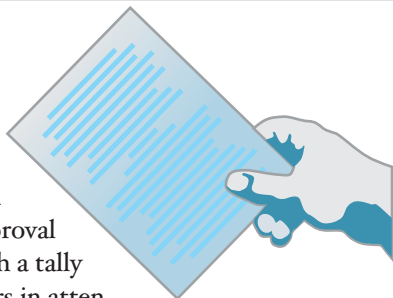
Part of the Executive Board report is routine—business the Board must conduct according to the law, the IBEW Constitution, Local 1245 Bylaws, or local union policies. The membership has no input on these operational matters; they are simply reported for

members' information.

Other parts of the Executive Board report require the members' approval. If a member questions an item, that item is removed from the approval process. The item will be explained, then the members may discuss and then approve or disapprove that item. Disapproval of any item is noted in the minutes, along with a tally of "yes" and "no" votes. A majority of members in attendance at the unit meetings voting for or against shall constitute the action of the entire local union, according to the by-laws. In this way, the union's founders have assured that individual members, through their units, retain final power in determining the union's course of action.

Usually there is no challenge to any Executive Board items. (The Executive Board, after all, is also a deliberative body and its proposals are usually seen as reasonable.) The unit chair will then call on the members to approve the report by unanimous consent.

A member uncertain what is happening can say, "Point of information" (called an incidental motion) and request that a matter be explained.



PROPOSITIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP; REPORTS ON CANDIDATES; BALLOTING OR VOTING ON CANDIDATES; OBLIGATIONS OF CANDIDATES

Reports of Candidates was originally established as the time for nominating people to membership in the union. This function is now generally performed by the Executive Board, which accepts membership applications.

But new members can still present themselves at unit meetings, where the unit chair will administer "the obligation," where new members promise to abide by the union's constitution and by-laws and to not sacrifice the union's interests in any manner.



Al Fortier, chair of Unit 2211, City of Oakland, administers the obligation to Sal Tafaoa, left.

REPORTS OF BUSINESS MANAGER, DELEGATES AND COMMITTEES

The business manager's report, usually given by a union business representative, informs unit members of the business manager's activities on their behalf. Members are given an opportunity to ask questions or make comments about this report. This discussion sometimes becomes a free-wheeling give and take. The business representative or unit chair, to keep the meeting orderly, may determine that any specific concern should be raised later, under "Good of the Union".

Delegate and committee reports are made next, including reports by Advisory Council members. Any business resulting from reports should be handled immediately. Business nearest completion comes first.

REPORT OF ACCIDENT, SICKNESS OR DEATH



This is the time to report on members who have suffered accident, sickness or death. The name and headquarters should be included in the minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The unit recorder screens previous minutes for unit business which has not been

Daniel Trowbridge, left, is chair for Unit 4015, Burney/Frontier. Mary Unterreiner, right, is recorder.

concluded and reports this to the chairperson, who then sees to it that the members have a chance to act upon it. Any member may make a "point of order" if an item has been overlooked. Robert Rules of Order restricts the type of items that fall under this heading. In most cases, such business is more appropriately handled under "reports".

NEW BUSINESS

Nomination, election or installation of officers occurs during News Business. Election of Local 1245 officers, Executive Board members and Advisory Council members occur at three-year intervals. Nominations for these positions are made at the March unit meetings. Unit officers are nominated and elected by the unit meetings during New Business at the June meeting.

New Business is also the time to introduce a new proposal for the unit to consider. There can be no discussion on any subject until a motion has been made, properly seconded, and repeated by the Chair.



John Shepherd is Chair for Unit 4419, Redding/Davey Tree.

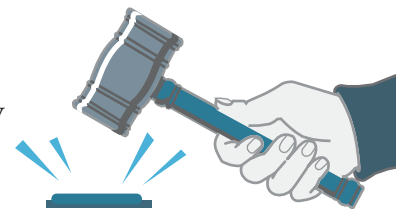
GOOD OF THE UNION

This is the time members may voice any concerns that could not be raised during earlier parts of the meeting. This is a time for reports by anyone who has information that may be relevant to the group. Grievance issues may be reported for informational purposes or to obtain answer on contractual questions. But if a "gripe" session begins, the chair or the business representative may refer the matter for further discussion outside of the unit meeting so that the meeting may be brought to a timely conclusion.

CLOSING

When business is concluded, the chair and recorder make sure that a copy of the attendance register and a copy of the minutes are forwarded to the Local Union Recording Secretary. The chair then asks the members to rise and officially concludes the deliberative assembly with the following words:

"With the business of the present meeting being concluded, I declare this Unit Meeting of the Local Union duly and legally closed until our next regular meeting unless specially called. Our next regular meeting will be on (date)."



Former Executive Board member offers guidance for unit leaders

This story was prepared with assistance from James Wilburn. Initiated into the IBEW in 1955, Wilburn became a Communications Technician for Pacific Gas & Electric in 1962. He served as a shop steward, recorder and chair for Unit 1111 in Fresno, and on various ballot and election committees, as well as the 1973-74 PG&E Negotiating Committee. He served on the Executive Board in 1976. After



James Wilburn in a 1991 photo

going on long-term disability Wilburn earned a Master's Degree from California State University, acquiring knowledge of parliamentary procedure along the way. Brother Wilburn provided this story on unit meetings to the Utility Reporter late in 2005. We publish it this month with the hope that it might encourage members to consider participating in Local 1245 as unit officers.