

Voting Rights in B.C. and Yukon:

The Committee on Membership and Voting Rights at Grand Lodge was formed to review, report and recommend on the two conflicting proposals to change the existing voting system put forward at the Grand Lodge Communication in June 2005. These proposals were:

1. "All Master Masons in good standing attending the Grand Lodge Communication to have full voting rights".
2. "On all matters of business and election of officers, each constituted lodge shall be given one vote. The vote will be carried by the Worshipful Master or designated proxy registered with Grand Lodge. The total number of votes will equal the number of lodges registered with the credentials committee." Grand Lodge is the governing body of all freemasons in British Columbia and Yukon, however membership in Grand Lodge is limited only to those freemasons who have presided over a lodge as Worshipful Master. Each member of Grand Lodge is entitled to vote along with the three principal officers of each lodge. There is currently a proxy system in place to ensure that the votes of the three principal officers are carried to Grand lodge. A proxy must be carried by a member of Grand Lodge."

In 2005, 10,576 freemasons were members of lodges in British Columbia and Yukon. Of this number 3,619 or 34% held the rank of Worshipful Brother or higher and were members of Grand Lodge with the right to vote at Grand Lodge communications. The remaining 6,957 or 66%, although entitled to attend Grand Lodge communications, did not have the right to vote, their rights being expressed by the vote of the three principal officers who attend from their lodges or their proxies.

In 2005, there were 149 lodges in the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon. Of these lodges, 139 were represented at the annual communication in June 2005. The total ballots eligible to be cast on Saturday were 953 or 9% of the 10,576 freemasons in British Columbia and Yukon. Of that number, 579 were listed as Past Masters and 199 were principal officers of lodges. 175 proxies were carried. Also assuming that 66 of the 199 principal officers were Worshipful Masters, the number of members holding the rank of Worshipful Brother or higher was 645, or 18% of the 3,619 eligible voting members.

Not all freemasons choose to proceed through the chairs and become Worshipful Master of their lodge. In their own way, they contribute to the lodge and their views would be an asset to Grand Lodge. Many of these freemasons are far more knowledgeable about the workings of our lodges than the presiding officers.

Our senior members have seen tremendous changes during their lives—in transportation, communication, entertainment and education. The young members who come into the Craft are far more knowledgeable about Freemasonry because the Internet has provided them with the means to research the Craft before they make their approach. But having said that, little information exists on the government of our Craft. These new, young minds want to be involved and are far more sophisticated than many of us were at their age. We want to keep these young people in lodge as they are our future. To do so we have to compete with a multitude of other attractions such as sports and family. These young members are used to and want, a say in the government of the bodies they belong to and, generally speaking, they are very educated and have a lot to offer to our institution.

Some revisions are needed to the present membership and voting system of Grand Lodge to give adequate representation to all freemasons in British Columbia and Yukon. We have carefully considered the two proposals that were put forth to change the existing voting system and have concluded that there is merit in both proposals.

The proposal that "All Master Masons in good standing attending the Grand Lodge Communication have full voting rights" has been presented, and defeated, on several occasions at Grand Lodge. Concerns that have been put forward, are that Master Masons may not have the experience to understand the issues of Grand Lodge, especially younger members, and that Master Masons might be able to effect some form of bloc voting. Some have expressed concerns that large lodges would be able to assert more influence on voting if all Master Masons have the vote. Facility planning for our annual communications could also be affected with the increased number of attendees if Master Masons were given the vote. However, the experience of those jurisdictions which have adopted full membership and voting rights is that the numbers of Master

Masons attending their Grand Communication has not increased significantly and has had little or no impact on the government of their Grand Lodge.

The second proposal, that each constituted lodge shall be given one vote, was based on the success of the Grand Lodge of New Zealand in restructuring the management of their Grand Lodge, part of which included the elimination of individual voting and the implementation of a new lodge only voting system with proxy voting allowed. The New Zealand restructuring came about after a Management Review Committee investigated the future government of the Craft in New Zealand. Their recommendations were viewed as "radical and far-reaching" and included, in part, making all Master Masons members of Grand Lodge while also eliminating individual votes at Grand Lodge and replacing them with a lodge vote with proxy voting allowed.

The effect of the second proposal would give small lodges a level playing field with all lodges but could be viewed as prejudicing lodges with larger membership. The underlying intention of the second proposal is to have all matters to be voted on at Grand Lodge fully discussed in each lodge before the annual communication and the Worshipful Master or proxy of the lodge would reflect the wishes of the lodge.

Committee Recommendation

The Committee favours a change to the membership and voting in our Grand Lodge that would embody some of the benefits of both proposals, namely:

- making all Master Masons members of Grand Lodge;
- encouraging greater participation in the decision-making process at the lodge level;
- creating a level playing field between larger and smaller lodges in the voting process at Grand Lodge; and which, in addition, would:
- easily determine the number of voting members at a Grand Communication;
- ensure that lodges unable to have representation at any Grand Communications have the ability to appoint a freemason from another lodge to represent them; and
- simplify the registration of voting representatives at Annual Communications.

With these goals in mind, it is our opinion and recommendation that these goals can be achieved by making the following revisions to membership and voting rights at Grand Lodge:

1. Make all Master Masons members of Grand Lodge;
2. Abolish the existing voting rights;
3. Adopt a limited voting system where each constituent lodge shall have five (5) votes at Grand Lodge and the current Grand Lodge Officers shall have one (1) vote each. The number of votes given to each lodge would ensure that the Grand Lodge Communication would be attended by about the same number of voting representatives as under the present system. A lodge representative could be elected from the lodge's Master Masons, presiding lodge officers, Past Masters, Past Grand Lodge officers or a member of another lodge, ensuring the ability for every lodge to be represented by the most qualified and willing members available to attend. A current Grand Lodge officer would not be able to be a voting representative of his lodge as he would already have a vote through his Grand Lodge office.
4. Prohibit any member from exercising more than one vote.
5. Abolish the existing proxy system and replace it by a system for each constituent lodge to elect its representatives to vote at Grand Lodge.

To implement this system, a number of resolutions would have to be passed at Grand Lodge to amend our *Book of Constitutions*. The committee feels that all freemasons in British Columbia and the Yukon should be given an opportunity to review and comment on the contents of this report and recommendations. The report and the proposed changes to the *Constitutions* will be forwarded to each lodge secretary so that lodges and their members may forward any comments on the report and the resolutions to the committee through the Grand Secretary.

After the committee has had an opportunity to review the comments, they will submit a final report no later than 30 April 2007. In the interim, the committee will submit the proposed resolutions to the Grand Secretary to be included in the agenda of our 2007 Annual Communication. As the question of voting rights has come up at previous Grand Lodge Annual Communications and has proved to be a controversial and emotional issue, the committee recommends that the vote on the proposed changes to membership and voting at the 2007 Annual Communication be by written ballot to allow the members to vote their conscience without peer influence and to ensure an accurate count of the results.

(Ed. It will be interesting to see how the recommendations fare at the Communication later this year.)