

ITEM 40 | DILATORY, ABSURD, OR FRIVOLOUS MOTIONS

For the convenience of deliberative assemblies, it is necessary to allow some highly privileged motions to be renewed again and again after progress in debate or the transaction of any business, and to allow a single member, by calling for a division, to have another vote taken. If there was no provision for protecting the assembly, a minority of two members could be constantly raising questions of order and appealing from every decision of the chair, and calling for a division on every vote, even when it was nearly unanimous, and moving to lay motions on the table, and to adjourn, and offering amendments that are simply frivolous or absurd. By taking advantage of parliamentary forms and methods a small minority could practically stop the business of a deliberative assembly having short sessions, if there was no provision for such contingency. Congress met it by adopting this rule: "No dilatory motion shall be entertained by the speaker." But, without adopting any rule on the subject, every deliberative assembly has the inherent right to protect itself from being imposed upon by members using parliamentary forms to prevent it from doing the very thing for which it is in session, and which these forms were designed to assist, namely, to transact business. Therefore, whenever the chair is satisfied that members are using parliamentary forms merely to obstruct business, he should either not recognize them, or else rule them out of order. After the chair has been sustained upon an appeal, he should not entertain another appeal from the same obstructionists while they are engaged evidently in trying by that means to obstruct business. While the chair should always be courteous and fair, he should be firm in protecting the assembly from imposition, even though it be done in strict conformity with all parliamentary rules except this one, that no dilatory, absurd, or frivolous motions are allowed.

As an illustration of a frivolous or absurd motion, suppose Mr. A is to be in the city next week and a motion has been made to invite him to address the assembly at its next meeting, the meetings being weekly. Now, if a motion is made to refer the question to a committee with instructions to report at the next regular meeting, the chair should rule it out of order as frivolous or absurd.

