

ITEM PREFACE | PREFACE

A work on parliamentary law is needed, based, in its general principles, upon the rules and practice of Congress, but adapted, in its details, to the use of ordinary societies. Such a work should give not only the methods of organizing and conducting meetings, the duties of officers, and names of ordinary motions, but also a systematic statement in reference to each motion, as to its object and effect; whether it can be amended or debated; if debatable, the extent to which it opens the main question to debate; the circumstances under which it can be made, and what other motions can be made while it is pending. Robert's Rules of Order (published in 1876, slight additions being made in 1893) was prepared with a hope of supplying the above information in a condensed and systematic form, each rule being complete in itself, or giving references to every section that in any way qualifies it, so that a stranger to the work can refer to any special subject with safety.

The fact that during these thirty-nine years a half million copies of these Rules have been published would indicate that there is a demand for a work of this kind. But the constant inquiries from all sections of the country for information concerning proceedings in deliberative assemblies that is not contained in Rules of Order, seems to demand a revision and enlargement of the manual. To meet this want, the work has been thoroughly revised and enlarged, and, to avoid confusion with the old rules, is published under the title of "Robert's Rules of Order Revised."

The object of Rules of Order is to assist an assembly to accomplish in the best possible manner the work for which it was designed. To do this it is necessary to restrain the individual somewhat, as the right of an individual, in any community, to do what he pleases, is incompatible with the interests of the whole. Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of real liberty. Experience has shown the importance of definiteness in the law; and in this country, where customs are so slightly established and the published manuals of parliamentary practice so conflicting, no society should attempt to conduct business without having adopted some work upon the subject as the authority in all cases not covered by its own special rules.

While it is important that an assembly has good rules, it is more important that it be not without some rules to govern its proceedings. It is much more important, for instance, that an



assembly has a rule determining the rank of the motion to postpone indefinitely, than that it gives this motion the highest rank of all subsidiary motions except to lay on the table, as in the U.S. Senate; or gives it the lowest rank, as in the U.S. House of Representatives; or gives it equal rank with the previous question, to postpone definitely, and to commit, so that if one is pending none of the others may be moved, as under the old parliamentary law. This has been well expressed by one of the greatest of English writers on parliamentary law: "Whether these forms be in all cases the most rational or not is really not of so great importance. It is much more material that there should be a rule to go by than what that rule is; that there may be a uniformity of proceeding in business, not subject to the caprice of the chairman or captiousness of the members. It is very material that order, decency, and regularity be preserved in a dignified public body."

H.M.R.

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