



CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL SPECIAL REPORT

CONGRESS FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

**ANNUAL CONGRESS 2009
WINTER GARDENS BLACKPOOL**

**SUNDAY 14 JUNE 2009 to WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE 2009
9.30 am - 12.30 pm, 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm**

CEC SPECIAL REPORT TO CONGRESS 2009

GMB

CONGRESS FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS DELEGATES TO CONGRESS AND SECTION CONFERENCES

Introduction

1. This discussion note considers options open to the Central Executive Council regarding the rules on eligibility for election as delegates to the Union's (annual) Congress and (biennial) Section National Conferences.

The CEC meeting held on 7 September 2008 agreed to submit a rule amendment to Congress 2009 to change the representation level to 1 delegate per complete 1500 members in each Region with a consistent approach across all Regions for how Congress delegates are elected to encourage a wider Congress democracy.

The CEC were advised at its 2 December 2008 meeting that because of capacity issues at the Congress 2010 venue it is proposed that this Rule Amendment will not be effective until Congress 2011.

2. Under rules 8 and 18, each Region elects one Congress delegate from its fully financial membership in the preceding September on the basis of 1:2,000. The rules do not provide for reserved Section delegates but rule 19.11/.12 allows Regional Councils to seek CEC approval for by-laws establishing geographical and industrial sections to ensure fair representation.
3. Under rule A3.2 and the Special Report "Guidelines for Sections" adopted by Congress '93, each Region is represented by one Section Conference delegate from its financial membership in the Section on the basis of 1:2,000 up to a maximum of 150 delegates across the Union as a whole. Regions are obliged by rule to ensure geographically fair representation for members of the Section. In line with the Special Report delegates must be working in the Section covered by the Conference – this excludes those who are unemployed or who have retired from work in their Section.
4. In 2008, we held both Congress and Section Conferences. In a change from previous years, we held Section Conferences on the Tuesday and Wednesday morning of Congress week. There was just one election, for Congress delegates. Regions and Sections, in order to ensure an industrial representation across each Section, co-operated to arrange top up delegates for Section Conferences. Under this arrangement, every Congress delegate was entitled to attend his/her own Section Conference but top up delegates attended only their Section Conference and not Congress.

5. A number of facts are clear. First, the reduction in membership numbers (which reflects to some extent an actual fall, but also greater accuracy in the figures) means that we have seen almost a 25% drop in the number of elected Congress delegates from 383 in 1988 to 289 in 2008. Secondly, there is evidence that the average age of Congress delegates is higher than that for their Conference counterparts – not surprising given the requirement for the latter to be working in the Section and the fact that quite a few Congress delegates have retired from work. Lastly, Regions differ significantly in their arrangements for electing Congress delegates.
6. It is important that the Union continues to recognise and respect the continuing contribution of our activists who have retired from paid work:
 - we cannot afford to lose the wealth of experience that retired members bring to their activities on behalf of the Union and its members
 - retired members are an invaluable source of mentoring for younger activists
 - the difficulties we encounter in obtaining paid release for activists in the private sector are unlikely to ease as we enter a brutal recession. So the Union will continue to depend on retired activists in many cases to represent members in grievance and disciplinary meetings
 - it would appear very unfair to ask retired members to continue those efforts but exclude them from Congress.
7. Nevertheless, it is a matter of concern that some Regions' Congress delegations appear to exclude some key workplace representatives:
 - like all trade unions, we are first and always an organisation of *workers*. It is vital that our key decisions are made predominantly by workplace representatives;
 - Congress has ultimate say over all the Union's policies, industrial and general (including political issues) and of course it alone has authority to amend the Union's rules. While Section Conferences are advisory, they consider primarily the industrial or workplace priorities and objectives of the Union. Nevertheless, the demarcation line between the two is not clear-cut and it is not sensible for key workplace representatives to be under-represented at Congress;
 - we must continue to ensure that when Conferences in particular take decisions on workplace and industrial relations issues, they are fully representative of our members at work in the Sections. Only by doing so can we be sure that our members at work will accept that they owe a loyalty to those decisions.
8. These factors point away from a revolution and towards an evolution in our procedures so that they produce a more sensible balance in the make-up of Congress delegations.
9. Any change should apply to both those years in which Section Conferences take place and those in which they do not (i.e. in rules revision years).

Recommendations

10. The CEC has already agreed to recommend to Congress a move to one Congress delegate per complete 1,500 fully financial members in a Region. This will create sufficient extra places to help ensure that our retired activists continue to play a key role in Congress, while at the same time having more opportunities for our younger activists (including workplace representatives) to participate at the supreme policy making body of the Union. But it would be important to protect the predominantly workplace-based nature of our Section Conferences, for reasons set out above.

11. The CEC suggests that with effect from Congress 2011 Regional Congress and Section Conference delegations are elected on the following uniform basis:

The election of Section Conference delegates be rolled up into the election of Congress delegates.

A minimum 80% of each Region's delegates should be working members

The election should be conducted so as to ensure a balanced representation reflecting the geographical, sectional and industrial make-up of the Region and to ensure representative gender, ethnic and sexual orientation balance in the delegation.

Branches with more than 250 members as at the relevant September figures may nominate two members for election as delegates.

12. The CEC is invited to consider these options, with a view to reaching decisions in principle following which this paper will go out for Regional consultation. Any subsequent rule amendments would then be drafted for consideration at a future CEC meeting.

It is suggested that the Task Group be recalled to co-ordinate Regional responses and make recommendations to the CEC on these proposals.

If Congress were to accept these proposed changes any new rules would place an obligation on the CEC to issue guidelines for a uniform election across all Regions for the election of Congress (and therefore Section Conference) delegates.

This Special Report has been designed to promote discussion and participation in the shaping of our union's democratic future structures. The final outcome after consultation with Regions may well offer fresh perspectives for the CEC to consider.