

## ***How to construct a motion***

Writing a motion is like writing a rock anthem or playing football for England; we all think the people doing it are rubbish but it's a bit tricky to do it yourself. Here are a few clues.

TL;DR

First and foremost (and fivemost and sixmost), keep the thing short. Remember the Twitter test: cut off after 140 characters. Remember too the old adage: the more you write, the less will be read. No-one wants a motion that covers a whole column of the programme; literary kaolin should be applied. A motion is not a speech. A speech is a speech. The motion should merely convey the point.

Speaking of which, keep it simple. Keep it clear. You may be very clever but we are not interested in your knowledge of conflict theory or Stakhanovite economics. Nor do we want to be harangued in the subjunctive, future conditional or gerundive. On the other hand, literacy helps. Keep it simple. Keep it clear.

More matter; less words

Be specific about what you want. You don't necessarily have to explain your thinking; there's a speech for that. For example:

'This branch/AGM wants all Probation and Cafcass buildings to be painted red. Napo will campaign to this effect.'

That's fine. In your speech you can explain that this is a socialist colour, that blue is conservative, that green is wishy washy, that yellow is yellow and that purple is the spittle of the devil. You may also welcome an amendment which reads: 'In addition, Napo will paint the town red'.

Don't forget to say what the subject matter is and what is the desired outcome. It is not enough to write a motion which simply says:

'Napo WILL NOT STAND FOR IT!'

Nor, for that matter:

'Napo IS APPALLED!' Even though both are undoubtedly true.

Please do not 'call on' Napo to do things; you can call as much as you like but they may not listen. On the other hand, do not 'instruct' the officers to do things; that just puts their backs up. It's pretty safe to write a motion saying 'Napo will therefore put in a pay claim of £5000 across the board next year'. It's pretty safe because it makes sense, it won't get passed and everyone understands it. If passed through some oversight, it has to be followed.

Make it snappy!

Deadlines are a good idea. Without a deadline, inconvenient motions tend to get forgotten. The deadline should be reasonable but clear. 'Napo will write to the government by Christmas deriding privatisation and extolling the virtues of public service.' That's two things in one. It's totally useless so nothing will happen, but it's made us feel better; and everyone knows when Christmas is so it's quite clear. Make it new year if there are objections to Christmas.

This leads us to our next point. Do not write useless motions. Do not be worthy. You are creating a Napo policy which a few people will remember for decades. Say what you mean and say what you want to do. It can be industrial action; it can be a committee formulating a policy; it can be publicity around a heated topic. Whatever it is, the last sentence of the motion should spell it out.

A little bit of politics

Do not be afraid of the wider political picture. Again, however, it is not enough merely to say:

'Napo IS AGAINST WAR!'

Better would be: 'Napo believes that the current military campaign waged by Finland against Peru is unjust, environmentally damaging and prejudicial to the interests of the trade union movement. Napo will therefore campaign through the TUC for a boycott of Finnish lager until they change their ways. Campaigning Committee will report back on the progress of this campaign at the next NEC.'

It's best to get a motion to AGM through a branch; In this case it should be worded 'This branch/AGM...' for the branch meeting; if it gets through, the branch can be dropped. If you've got chums (sorry, like-minded political associates) in other branches, try to get the motion through their branches as well. This gives legitimacy as well as being very annoying to others.

Do not write motions with more than one course of proposed action in them. '(i) Campaign to stop meat eating in prisons. (ii) Refuse to work under a coalition government. (iii) Write to the monarch about litter around Balmoral.' If by any chance one of these is voted down, they all fall.

Here, then, is a draft motion:

'This branch/AGM believes that the present government is paying too little to do too much. In particular, Friday afternoons are a drain on the nervous system. Napo will therefore write to the government requesting a finish time of lunchtime for all government workers on Fridays. Should this letter not produce the desired result by 1st Jan, Napo will instruct its members to stop work the instant they have reached a full workload each week, based on current (though risible) workload measurement Figures. This is not industrial action but working to a contractual agreement.'

Jeremy Cameron  
On behalf of Steering Committee