

CONSTITUTION
AND
BY-LAWS
OF
NEWS AND LETTERS COMMITTEES

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Preamble

People everywhere, today, are looking for a new way of life under which man can be free to guide his own destiny: to set and establish his own way of living, his own conditions of work, and his own forms of association with his fellow-man.

The totality of the world crisis is seen in the basic inability of either the Russian or the American social, economic or political systems to solve any of the basic problems of the working-class, or to be able to offer any present or future freedom from exploitation, discrimination, degradation or misery.

The age of state capitalism, whether in its single-party totalitarian form or its parliamentary form, can offer nothing to humanity but the prospect of another war. The advent of nuclear weapons, possessed by both sides, seriously raises the question of the survival of mankind in the event of such a struggle.

We believe that the working people are the only force in the world today capable of changing present-day society and of evolving the forms and the shape of future society. Just as in 1936-37, the American working people found their own way, through the sitdown strikes, to industrial organization and the CIO, so they are searching today for the new political and social forms to fight the labor bureaucracy. Since the 1949-1950 miners' strike and the advent of automation, the problem of guiding their own destiny has moved to the point of production itself and posed the basic question: What kind of labor should man perform? Why should there be a division between mental and manual labor?

Abroad, the June 17th, 1953 revolt of the East German workers, and a few weeks later, the revolts in the Vorkuta forced labor camps in Russia itself, *began that which came to a climax in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 -- Workers' Councils leading the struggle for total freedom.* They have answered affirmatively the question: Can man be free in this age of totalitarianism?

The necessity for a new society is clear from the working people's opposition to war. That opposition is based upon a vision of a new society in which they, to a man, control their own lives. Any opposition to war, which is based on less than this, must end in capitulation to the war mongers.

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We feel that the Negro people occupy a place of special significance in American life. Their struggle for equality and justice, which is taking place every day in every city of the country and increasing in tempo and effectiveness, stands in the forefront of the minority struggle for full freedom.

We feel that the youth are a most precious source of our development. We recognize that even though the youth are not directly involved in production, they are the ones whose idealism in the finest sense of the word combines with opposition to existing adult society in so unique a way that it literally brings them alongside the workers as builders of the new society.

As part of the total search for a fundamentally new way of life, we hereby establish NEWS & LETTERS Committees. In keeping with this principle, we establish the paper, NEWS & LETTERS, whose editor shall be a worker, and the articles for which shall be written on a decentralized basis. The establishment of the publication, NEWS & LETTERS, is an integral part of this quest by workers, Negroes, youth and women, for totally new relations and for a fundamentally new way of life.

We undertake that space be available in the paper for youth which they will write and edit for themselves in keeping with the principle that they are organizationally independent of these NEWS & LETTERS Committees.

In establishing NEWS & LETTERS, our purpose is to create a means of communication among working people on their common problems, aspirations, ideas and needs. The paper thus becomes a weapon in the class struggle. We are creating a center around which the basic ideas of workers' emancipation and freedom can crystallize and find the broadest possible form of public expression.

NEWS & LETTERS shall be published at least once *a month*. It is our aim to assure its publication and to promote the firmest unity among workers, Negroes and other minorities, women, youth and those intellectuals who have broken with the rulingbureaucracy of both capital and labor. We see the labor bureaucracy as the last barrier to the full emancipation of the working-class.

We hold that the method of Marxism is the guide for our growth and development. Just as Marxism was born out of the working-class struggles of Marx's day, so today, Marxism is in the lives and aspirations of the working people. We hold it to be the duty of each generation to interpret Marxism for itself. The main problem is not what Marx wrote in 1843 or 1883, but what Marxism is today. We reject the attempt of both Communists and the Administration to identify Marxism, which is a theory of liberation, with its exact opposite, Communist totalitarianism.

Heretofore, American radical groups have failed to establish the theory of Marxism on native grounds despite (1) the great traditions of the Abolitionist movement whose aims and activity paralleled that of Karl Marx and the Workingmen's First International that came to the aid of the North in the Civil War; and (2) the historic contributions the struggle for the 8-hour day by the American workers made to Marx's thinking, specifically to the structure of his greatest theoretical work, CAPITAL. We have therefore undertaken to set forth our own interpretation, in book form. *"MARXISM AND FREEDOM...from 1776 until today" has accomplished this task by: (1) establishing the American roots of Marxism; (2) presenting a comprehensive attack on present-day Communism, which is, in truth, a form of state capitalism; (3) re-establishing Marxism in its original form of "a thorough-going Naturalism or Humanism;" and (4) pointing to the new Humanist philosophy of the working-class in this period of Automation as expressed in their actions, and in their own words through NEWS & LETTERS. "MARXISM AND FREEDOM" is our theoretical foundation. However, it is not a "program."*

We make no pretense of being a political party. We constitute ourselves as NEWS & LETTERS Committees whose members come together to promote their ideas in an organized manner *and constantly to renew them in the practice of the class struggle.* We have no interests separate and apart from those of the workers as a whole.

Those who join us in these committees do so of their own free will by an acceptance of these general principles. They are bound only to carry out the decisions which the members have arrived at democratically. Others, who are not members, are free to contribute material for the paper and to participate in the discussions of these committees.

Accepting these principles, we adopt the following By-Laws for our conduct:

By-Laws

- 1) The Convention of the entire membership of the NEWS & LETTERS Committees shall be the highest body of the organization.
- 2) The Convention shall be assembled on a nation-wide basis as often as is necessary, but in no case shall more than two years elapse between Conventions.
- 3) The Convention shall elect a National Editorial Board by secret ballot. The NEB shall function as the highest body in the organization between Conventions. The NEB shall elect its own officers.
- 4) The NEB has the right to co-opt members between Conventions, when necessity arises, by full vote of all NEB members. The NEB is to inform the local committees of their action and the reason for it.

The youth shall elect their own representative to the NEB who shall be accorded full rights and privileges on the NEB.

5) The NEB members shall meet in full or plenary session at least once a year. *Its members must attend all plenums and conventions unless excused by a majority of the NEB members polled. The NEB members are to meet periodically, no less often than once every two months as regional bodies.*

6) The members of the NEB who are resident in the center where the paper is published shall constitute the Resident Editorial Board, and shall act for the membership in all matters affecting the immediate needs of the committees. The REB shall meet at least once every two weeks.

7) The REB shall issue a call for a Convention at least ninety days before the date set. Resolutions and discussion material shall be presented in bulletin form at least sixty days before the Convention to permit the fullest discussion by the membership. All members of the committees, as of the date of the Convention call, shall have voice and vote at the Convention. Any member, or group of members, may submit any resolutions, constitutional amendments or discussion material.

8) One-third of the membership, provided they are not all members of the same local committee, may at any time call for a special Convention which would then be conducted under these rules.

9) The decisions of the Convention shall be binding on all committee members.

10) Local committees may be established with their own local rules and regulations provided that these do not conflict with this constitution. Three or more members in a single city may apply to the REB to set up a local committee.

11) In localities where fewer than three members reside, these members shall be members-at-large, responsible to the REB.

12) Regular contributions, for employed members shall be \$1.00 a week, and for unemployed members 25¢ a week. Special contributions to the organization sustaining fund are voluntary.

13) Local committees shall meet at least once every two weeks and shall send full minutes of their activities and decisions to each other and to the REB.

14. Membership:

Membership shall be a privilege among freely associated individuals. Acceptance of membership carries with it acceptance of responsibility to carry out and loyally to support decisions commonly arrived at by the majority. The membership of any local committee can invite others to work or participate with them in their discussions, or to exclude those whose conduct would hurt the organization.

a. Members may be suspended for conduct detrimental to the working class, or for conduct unbecoming a member of the group. *Where the member serves on the REB or NEEB, and therefore cannot be expelled except by the full membership which elected him or her, the REB shall have the power to suspend him or her until the following Convention.*

b. Members shall be dropped for irregular attendance at meetings, or for being more than a month in arrears in contributions, without proper excuse.

c. Members may be expelled by the local committees for proved charges of class collaboration, chauvinism against Negroes or other minority groups.

d. To protect members against false charges, any charges against any member must be presented to him or her in writing, in detail, at least twenty-four hours before the charges are heard by the committee. The person so charged shall have the opportunity to speak and to defend himself against the charges (1) before the executive of the local committee; (2) before the local committee itself. He or she shall also have the right of appeal (1) to the REB; (2) to the next Convention.

e. If, at some future time, former members who have been dropped wish to reapply for membership, they shall be accepted only on the basis of passing through a satisfactory probationary period of three months, during which time they shall demonstrate their serious intentions.

f. Members who have been expelled must first apply to the REB for re-admission.

15) This Constitution and these By-Laws may not be fundamentally amended except by a majority vote of the Convention in full assembly.

Adopted July 8, 1956
Amended September 1, 1958.*

*The sections enclosed by asterisks indicate where changes were made.