

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS
for
NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES

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 totalitarian form or its capitalist-democratic 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 of today capable of changing present-day society and of evolving the forms and the shape of future society. Just as in 1936-1937, 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?

Abroad, the June 17th revolt of the East German workers in 1953, and the revolts, a few weeks later, of the slave laborers in the Vorkuta prison camps in Russia itself, and the 1956 revolt of the Polish workers, show man's determination to fight for his 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.

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 increases in tempo and effectiveness, stands in the forefront of the minorities' struggle for full freedom.

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, the purpose is to create a means of communication among working people on their common problems, aspirations, ideas and needs. 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 and acceptance, and, in this sense, to be a weapon in the class struggle.

NEWS & LETTERS shall be published at least once every two weeks. 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 ruling bureaucracy of both capital and labor. We hold that the labor bureaucracy is 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 the struggle for the shortening of the Working Day and the Civil War in the United States gave shape to Marx's greatest theoretical work, CAPITAL, 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 because the 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 with Communism. Communism is totalitarianism and the exact opposite of Marxism which is a theory of liberation.

Heretofore, American radical groups have failed to establish the theory of Marxism on native grounds despite the historic contributions the American workers made to Marx's thinking. We have therefore undertaken to set forth our own interpretation, in book form. It will express Marxism as a world view and as an exposition of the workers' struggles in America in this period of automation. Our concern is, of necessity, with the American workers and their strivings for a better life.

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. 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 decision 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 the conduct of our affairs:

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 shall meet in full or plenary session at least once a year.
- 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 NEB between plenary sessions, and 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 dues for employed members shall be \$1.00 per week, and for unemployed members 25¢ per week. 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.

b. Members shall be dropped for irregular attendance at meetings, or for being more than a month in arrears in dues, 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.

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e. If, at some future time, former members who have been dropped wish to re-apply 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

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