

FINANCE REPORT 2020

Last year's report began: "This year reflects one of the most critical financial periods in our organizational history. Our philosophic-financial principles and practices are challenged by the rapidly-changing realities of 21st century capitalism as well as by the state of our organization." This year, we should write those words in **bold, poster-size letters** with "Pow!"

"Whamo!" and of course "Zoom!" decorating the page. In spite of these challenges, as Bob stated, "Many organizations' crises have pulled them under, so the fact that we exist and are planning the future is a positive we should not take for granted."

Just two months later, "the rapidly-changing realities" have plunged to new depths as President Trump's election campaign continues to build an ideology of "alternate reality" appealing to an ever-expanding base of people who believe his lies. Whether it's the kidnapping of Joe Biden by the "Radical Left" (if only...), constant chipping at election integrity, shrugging off 205,000 COVID-19 deaths, or ignoring the blatant miscarriage of justice for Breonna Taylor, incessant political TV ads are normalizing these messages.

We are caught up in a deadly global pandemic and a new expansion of disaster capitalism, with ramifications we cannot yet fully grasp, on top of capitalism's "normal" human and ecological damage. Most important, however, are new revolutionary upsurges. Black youth-led protests with significant white support against police brutality and systemic racism in this country are matched by a second explosion, this of revolutionary rage and determination to smash their entire government, in Lebanon. Out of the headlines but equally significant are the protests against Netanyahu in Israel, Hong Kong's ongoing resistance to Chinese totalitarian brutality, and rebellion in Belarus.

The Pandemic and the Capitalist Economy

The pandemic has affected the global economy in ways we are only beginning to know, despite its immediate hardships wreaked on working families. Three stories that only begin to reveal the huge changes:

- An Illinois teacher writes: "We are still learning the technology and dealing with its malfunctions...There is little help from the techno-wizard technology staff (now cut from 5 people to 3.) In Teachers have the option to teach from their classrooms, but there is no way I will risk entering that building. The district got rid of a custodian. The ventilation was never fixed. We will have no personal protective equipment (PPE.) The custodian drops a bag of breakfast. The teacher has to distribute, supervise, and clean up. Repeat at lunchtime. At the end of every school day teachers are required to do all the classroom sanitation.

- Peaceful Black Lives Matter protests continue in Detroit, where Detroit Will Breathe leader Caroline Baker states their movement aims to make “thinkers out of fighters and fighters out of thinkers.” Police Chief Craig’s response originally touted “good” police-community relations, is now emphasizing what he won’t tolerate and railing against “outsiders.” Detroiters know that the city’s abandonment by white residents and by capital 60 years ago has left it economically starved today. And its leaders do not want to see the real solidarity between young Black and white protestors seeking a better world.
- In June in Detroit 3 urban gardening and farming organizations announced they were raising funds, online, for the purchase of land for Black farmers in Detroit. People recognized that the global situation would result in even more loss of land by Black people, between the highest unemployment since the 1930’s and an expected huge jump in evictions from an already high baseline number. The goal was announced to be \$20,000.00 and within 4 days had exceeded \$30,000. It now stands above \$55,000 and continues to grow. The cause, the idea, had become so important to hundreds of Detroiters that they gave \$25.00 - \$200.00 in an environment of economic instability, but also at a time when “Black Lives Matter” has become a mass movement.

Facts and Figures

Our 3 main expense categories are: office rent, \$14,000; printing the paper, \$5,000 and mailing it, \$5,000. The copier, office supplies, telephone and “miscellaneous” total \$6800.00. Expenses last year were \$30,159.00, compared to \$31,400.00 last year. Most or all of that \$1200 drop is because we did not print and mail the May-June issue, although letters to subscribers resulted in an additional postage cost.

Income this year totals \$37,392, most of it from dues, pledges and other donations, leaving us with \$7233 at the beginning of June 2020. Local income remained similar to previous years.

What continues to decline is literature sales. For the paper, \$525 was received for subscriptions and \$196 in single-copy sales. Restricted activity caused by COVID-19 no doubt accounts for these low figures. Sales of our major books were up from last year; the top sellers were the Russian Revolution and the Marx books at \$134 and \$128 each. Many of these sales were online transactions. Another notable fact of our income is \$2,349 from Paypal, whose fees amount to only \$24.00, about 1%: clearly a worthwhile addition to our outreach repertoire.

The consequences of the ongoing pandemic and the fire and flood damage to our storeroom will continue to have major effects on our finances. Massive inventory losses mean that we will have to buy -if we can find them—some of our own publications. Converting other books and pamphlets

to ebooks involves a lengthy labor-intensive process, initial costs, and a lower selling price although the wider audience online may offset this eventually.

What is the attitude to finances in Marxist-Humanism?

The attitude of News & Letters Committees to finances stems from a philosophy of organization which recognizes that we need money, but gives only the barest necessary concessions to capitalist financial principles, practices and attitudes. Marxist-Humanist philosophy in the financial sector centers on the human relationships among the organization, members and friends, sympathizers, co-thinkers and even those with differing views.

Dues, pledges, fundraisers, literature sales, subscriptions and donations are the sole source of our income. The people who provide them do so freely. Together all donations and sales, large or small, reflect a range of levels of commitment to the only Marxist-Humanist organization in the US.

Let us consider how much richer in human terms Marxist-Humanist philosophy transforms an activity which in the capitalist world is a mere financial transaction: the “sale” of a subscription to *News & Letters*.

In the capitalist economy a sale is an end and ideally a means to hook the victim into more purchases.

In contrast, to Marxist-Humanists, the sale of a sub is not just a means to an end. It is a new beginning and hopefully will grow into a becoming, a new kind of human relationship. A sub provides a year’s worth of news, analysis, dialogue and Marxist-Humanist philosophy for which there is no substitute. But most importantly, as Terry says, the paper is the beginning of a dialogue. With a subscription, readers have an ongoing opportunity to read and discuss the articles, write their own responses or report on their discussions. Although our prisoner-subscribers have little internet access, they write letters. From these we learn that they not only read, but discuss and share their print copies with other inmates.

And last but not least, a subscription provides insight into our organizational philosophy. From the prominence of Raya’s column to a full page of Readers’ Views, to the wide range of participant-authors (no staff writers on our staff!) to our “Who We Are” statement and most uniquely to our Draft Perspectives, we tell people what we stand for. A sub to News & Letters is a year-long opportunity to collectively develop the ideas and practice of Freedom.

Since we are in such contrast to prevailing attitudes, how are we making sure that people know what we stand for in this regard? We can make our philosophy better known; for example, this discussion of our financial principles could be the basis for an article on the website or in the paper, and we can craft other ways to let people know what we mean when we say the sale of a book or sub is a commitment.

The State of Our Organization

Our most essential functions, aligned with our philosophy, are first, creating, printing and mailing the paper. Correspondence, maintaining a website, selling our literature and producing new publications are equally important as is preserving our irreplaceable historic documents. Organizational growth, though much more elusive to achieve, ranks even higher, as the lack of it impedes our abilities to perform the other functions.

News and Letters is a different kind of organization from those who sponsored the Black Land Fund campaign, but we also need to fund ourselves in a very tumultuous and changed world. How can we make clear to people that the Marxist-Humanist idea, the newspaper and website and organization, are worth funding now? How do we compete for donations in 2020-21? We exist in a fund-raising landscape where we are deluged with repeated mail, email, Facebook posts, TV and radio ads all trying to raise money. (We were thrilled with the drop-off in junk mail due to the pandemic until we found out that it's not our postage stamps but junk mail that keeps the post office afloat.) Even the clunkiest website manages to make online donation easy as pie.

The primary underlying concerns regarding organizational growth and outreach are as always addressed in a variety of ways and throughout other Convention reports. Nevertheless, there are some steps we can take to improve our financial situation. One of these is the new creative method of publishing the "What is Socialism?" pamphlet—which will of course include an invitation for readers to subscribe and donate.

Similarly, looking for new ways to reach the incarcerated, can we reach out to some of the advocacy groups which have emerged or taken on new life since the pandemic? One of these is Michigan liberation, "a statewide organization dedicated to the leadership development of community members and creation of effective campaigns to advance racial, gender, economic and environmental justice in Michigan." Its membership includes young Black women and promotes "comprehensive criminal justice reform." info@miliberation.org or www.miliberation.org.

Other ideas for improving our financial picture:

1. **DUES:**

a) Members consider doubling or tripling the minimum weekly \$1.00 dues.

b) Members volunteer to pledge their annual dues amount when they pledge contributions to the sustaining fund. For example, "Dues, \$52.00 per year; Sustaining Fund, \$500.00." *A pledge is a promise, a commitment, an aid for self-discipline and an aid in budgeting for the organization. If we can pledge to the sustaining fund, we can pledge to a weekly contribution. Organizers should be following up on members' financial commitments.*

2. **SUBSCRIPTION STRUCTURE AND PRICING.**

- (1) Offer INDIVIDUAL subs as print or online.
- (2) Keep the sub price at \$5.00 per year

- (3) Offer print or online **PRISONER SUPPORT SUBS** for \$10.00 a year. (Print or online to the donor, print to a prisoner.)
- (4) Offer **SOLIDARITY SUBS** \$25.00 and up per year (1 print or online, 1 prisoner, \$ extra to support the work of N & L Committees.)

*Yes people give what they can, but new objective developments create new insights and open choices which have seemed impossible or non-existent before, as in the response to the **Black Land Fund** campaign or the surge in donations to **ACT BLUE** after the death of **Ruth Bader Ginsburg**. We have nothing to lose by offering subscription options and we would do well to make explicitly concrete, as we do with offering prisoner support subs. This year we can offer, sadly, fire recovery solidarity subs. I note that a former member, who has gone in a very different direction, wrote in on Facebook to express sympathy for the fire damage to the office.*

- 3. **NEW BOOKS.** Renew efforts to review and promote them. E book conversion and publication is continuing, spearheaded by Eugene and Buddy.
- 4. **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS WITH PRISONERS.** We need to take advantage of electronic communication with prisoners, like on Jpay. There may be other and better options as well.
- 5. **WEBSITE DONATIONS:** Give more prominence to “Donate” on our website. Offer “special deals” in each issue of the paper on the literature we still have. Keep adding new content to the website so that more people will visit our site. Are there other ways we can do a better job getting people to respond? A statement that donor information is confidential and not for sale in our literature list in the paper, appeal ads and on the website may help people overcome resistance to donating.
- 6. **NEW (LESS EXPENSIVE) PRINTING AND MAILING OPTIONS.** This is under discussion, thanks to the initiative of the Bay Area Local.

This year the Sustaining Fund goal is proposed as \$32,000.

Susan Van Gelder

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