

Constitution and Regulations ¹



of the National Unemployment Council of the United States

1934

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Foreword

THE Constitution of the National Unemployment Council of the United States was adopted at the Third National Convention which was held in Washington, D.C., on February 3, 4, and 5, 1934. The fact that for nearly four years up to that time, the leading national unemployed movement in the United States functioned and conducted brilliant campaigns and struggles without benefit of a formal constitution is noteworthy.

The Unemployment Councils are organizations that grew up out of the desperate need for defensive action on the part of the millions of workers who found themselves deprived of the opportunity to work and provide a livelihood for themselves and their families. The first consideration of the workers who formed these fighting organizations was, and is, the immediate need for food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life. How to get these essentials quickly and in sufficient measure is the chief problem of the victims of mass unemployment and consequently of the groups that formed themselves as Unemployment Councils.

The organizers of the Unemployment Councils had no time or inclination to draw blue-prints of imaginary "perfect" organizations. They realized that experience gained in the course of struggle would provide the best pattern for a fighting organization. In the course of the struggle itself, the workers established rules, regulations, and organizational forms that would serve to make their organizations stronger and more effective.

The Constitution of the National Unemployment Council is therefore the concentrated experience of hundreds of thousands of courageous, uncompromising fighters who claim that the right to decent existence, for the great masses who are unemployed through no fault of their own, must stand above the profit interests of those who hold and control the wealth of this country.

Therefore, the first law of the National Unemployment Council is that "Not one worker or his family shall be without decent food, clothing and shelter!" Every provision of the Constitution has for its purpose the enforcement of this law. This must be the guiding principle in the application and interpretation of this Constitution.

For this reason, the Constitution is intended as a guide to action and not as a straitjacket. The National Unemployment Council is a voluntary association of those who desire to further the interests of the workers (employed as well as unemployed) who suffer as a result of mass unemployment. Our success depends upon the initiative which the masses develop in action. This initiative will serve to produce constant suggestions for improvement in the organizational structure and regulations of our movement. As quickly as they are tested in struggle and found effective, such suggestions are made a part of the daily practice and basic rules of our movement.

At the same time, we must recognize that mass action is essential just because individual action is helpless and useless. Therefore, any individual or group who may attempt to set themselves, their will and their laws up above and against the collective will and law which is embodied in this Constitution, cannot help our fight. Our movement depends upon the united strength of the masses and not upon the "genius" of some "great" individual or isolated group. Our organization belongs to the whole body of workers that make up the membership and to the greater body of workers whom our movement aims to serve. Anyone who attempts to bend our movement to his personal interests and will have no place in this organization. Any individual who attempts to accomplish individually the tasks of the organization is bound to fail. Collective leadership and mass action are the keystone of our organization.

Mass unemployment is now a permanent feature of present-day capitalist society. An organized movement to defend the economic interests of the workers who are the first victims of unemployment is as necessary and as inevitable as is the trade union movement that has developed out of the needs and struggles of the workers in the industries. The National Unemployment Council is the product of this need. It has faced and will continue to face the sharp, brutal attacks of the ruling class which is responsible for unemployment and which bitterly resists every attempt to compel adequate provision for the maintenance of decent living standards and even the very existence of the masses.

In these attacks, the ruling class makes use of every form of terror and trickery. It will continue to employ its police and military power, its politicians, demagogues, traitors, splitters, and disruptors.

The National Unemployment Council is built upon a full realization of the kind of struggles that must be waged and the forces against whom this struggle must be directed.

We build a movement that is composed of, and open to, every honest worker who agrees with our aims, regardless of political, religious, racial, or national differences. We aim to establish a united front that will embrace all workers' organizations and lead to the necessary complete unification of all existing organizations into one mighty organization.

We build a movement that concerns itself with the most minute needs of the unemployed worker and his family, but which never forgets that our every struggle is directed towards winning greater and more permanent economic security by compelling the establishment of a federal system of unemployment and social insurance.

We build a movement that demands rights and begs no favors; that does not plead but fights; that does not make deals but exerts organized pressure; that does not expect miracles but realizes that gains are made through struggle, effort, and sacrifice.

We build a movement that trusts no promises but depends upon its organized power to win and hold concessions.

We build a movement that scorns the petty bribes with which the ruling class sometimes seeks to buy freedom to continue its program of robbery and exploitation. We fight for the whole working class and therefore for the most oppressed sections, such as the Negro and foreign-born, because this is the only way to gain permanent benefits for all.

We gain inspiration and strength from every struggle of any and every group of workers against the common enemy of all – the oppressors and exploiters of the masses. That is why we support by every possible means every such struggle of the workers, employed and unemployed, in this or any other country.

We recognize as friends and allies the toiling farmers and the professional workers. We regard as enemies all who, in whatever disguise, urge us to be patient in our suffering, meek before our oppressors, modest in our demands, tolerant toward traitors, thankful for scraps of “charity”, and dependent upon the kind favors and glib promises of self-seeking political tools of the ruling class.

Ours is the movement and organization of the most useful and therefore most powerful section of the population – the workers who by their labor have produced the great wealth of this country. We claim the right to work and to produce the necessities of life for ourselves and for all other useful members of society.

Whether those who claim ownership of the natural wealth and productive machinery of this country can give us work or not – we claim and fight for the right to live!

HERBERT BENJAMIN.

CONSTITUTION

of the National Unemployment Council

(Adopted at the National Convention Against Unemployment, February 3, 4 and 5, 1934, Washington, D.C.)

PREAMBLE

MASS unemployment has now become a permanent feature of the economic system under which we live. Millions are denied the opportunity to work and earn a livelihood for themselves and their families. The menace of unemployment hangs over the head of every worker in every industry and occupation. Agricultural as well as industrial; professional as well as manual workers, all suffer and all are menaced by the deep, lasting and intense crisis into which present day society has been thrown by the decay of the system in which production is directed in the interest of profits for a few rather than to supply the needs of the many.

Ownership of the wealth and means of production — the mines, mills, factories, railroads and land — is concentrated in the hands of an ever-diminishing number of bankers and industrialists. Control of this great wealth also gives them the power to control the government and thus withhold from the starving masses the right to produce and enjoy the essentials of life.

Only the organized mass pressure and struggle of all victims of mass unemployment and insecurity, Negro and white, can force the owners of wealth and their governmental agents to provide the means of safeguarding the home, the family, and the very existence of the masses who face and suffer poverty in the midst of plenty. Only by forcing the government to establish unemployment and social insurance at rates equal to average wages can even partial economic security and the preservation of living standards be assured for all.

Our task is to see that not one unemployed worker or his family shall be without decent food, housing and clothing.

Our aim is to win security by forcing enactment of the Workers' Unemployment and Social Insurance Bill.

As the means to this end, we direct ourselves to the development of a mighty united fighting movement that shall include all workers and poor farmers, regardless of sex, race, nationality, religious or political faith, or other affiliation. This unity, for militant and determined struggle, shall be effected through the National Unemployment Council of the United States of America.

Article I.

Name and Character

1. The name of the united front movement is the National Unemployment Council of the U.S.A.
2. The National Unemployment Council of the U.S.A. accepts into its rank's workers, toiling farmers, professionals and their organizations, without distinction as to nationality, race, color, sex, religious or political affiliation or belief.

Article II.

Sub-Divisions

The National Unemployment Council is based upon the following subdivisions and units: State; County; City and Regional Councils and Locals.

1. The State organization shall be known by the name of the state in which it operates, thus: Illinois Unemployment Council, and indicate affiliation to National Council.
2. The County organization shall be known by the name of the county, thus: Allegheny County Unemployment Council, and indicate affiliation to State and National Council.

3. The city or town councils shall be known by the name of their city or town, thus: Unemployment Council of Indianapolis, and indicate affiliation to County, State, and National Council.
4. The ward or precinct council or local shall be known by the number of the given ward or precinct, thus: Fifteenth Ward Unemployment Council (or local), and indicate affiliation to city and county.
5. Locals (or councils) formed on an industrial or trade basis, or in a given section of a city or town, or within any organization or shop, shall be known accordingly, thus: Textile Workers' Unemployment Council (or Local), or Logan Circle; or Brotherhood of Carpenters Local (and number), or Relief Workers' Local; or Unemployed Citizens' Local (or Council).

Article III.

Emblem

The emblem of the National Unemployment Council shall be an arm grasping at the throat of a skeleton head (representing hunger). Under this shall appear the slogan: "Fight Against Hunger" and around this a circular border in which shall be imprinted "**National Unemployment Council – For Workers' Bill.**"

Article IV.

National Convention and National Executive Board of the National Unemployment Council.

1. The highest body of the Council is the National Convention, representing the rank and file, which shall be held annually.
2. The National Convention shall elect a National Executive Board of not less than 50 members which shall govern our movement between Conventions.
3. Any member of a properly affiliated organization shall be eligible for membership on the National Executive Board. Between the National Conventions, the National Executive Board of the N.U.C. is the governing body. The National Executive Board shall have the authority to speak in the name of the entire organization on all matters of concern to the victims of mass unemployment, launch national campaigns and fix days of national struggle and demonstrations. It sets the date of the National Convention, **subject to the approval of affiliated organizations.**
4. The National Convention shall elect the following officers of the National Unemployment Council: The Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen, the Secretary-Treasurer, and the National Organizer.
5. The National Executive Board shall subdivide its work and select its heads of departments as the work requires, and have the right to

propose assignments of field organizers subject to the approval of the affiliated organizations in the given territory.

6. The National Executive Board shall issue characters, membership books, and stamps to all affiliates.
7. The National Executive Board elects a National Committee of not more than 13 of its members who live in the vicinity of the National Office. The Committee shall act for the National Executive Board between meetings of the N.E.B.
8. The National Committee shall be in regular communication with the N.E.B. members; help guide the activities of the affiliated organizations and set up State, County and local organizations where none exists.
9. The National Executive Board shall submit a quarterly report on activities, decisions, organizational work, and finances to the rank and file of all affiliated organizations.
10. The National Executive Board shall give 60 days' advance notice before calling of Conventions and shall provide proposed agenda, draft resolutions, etc., for discussion, emergency situations excepted. Special Conventions can be called upon the request of one-third of all the affiliated organizations.

Article V.

Referendum and Recall

1. The membership of the N.U.C. shall have the right to demand a general referendum vote on all fundamental questions affecting the vital interests of the unemployed and part-time workers and their organization. The National Executive Board shall make provisions for such referendum when occasion arises.

2. The membership of the National Unemployment Council shall have the right to demand the recall or removal of any National, State, County, city or local officers who, in the opinion of the majority of the membership of the respective area or sub-division, fail to perform their duty in the interests of the organization.

3. Any member or affiliated organization that de-sires to launch a referendum or recall as pro-vided in this article shall have the right to forward such proposal to the National Committee which shall then publish such request in the first Bulletin of the N.U.C. which appears within ten days after such request is received. When such proposal is approved by affiliated organizations in not less than fifteen cities or counties (or by a majority of such organizations), the referendum or recall shall be formally submitted for a decisive vote.

Article VI.

Locals

1. The basic organizational unit of the N.U.C. is the local. The local may be based on the block, precinct, or neighborhood; and in smaller towns on the ward or general township. Where necessary and practical, trade, industrial and language locals may be formed. In order to be chartered as a local, a minimum of 25 members and the approval of the next higher sub-division in the area are required.
2. Each local should elect an executive committee of five or more members. This committee shall have power to act for the local between regular meetings and may call special meetings when necessary.
3. The following officers should also be elected and should be included in the Executive Committee: a chairman, organizer, secretary, and treasurer.
4. Standing committees such as Welfare and Grievances; Eviction and Utilities; Education and Social; Women's; Youth; Negro, etc., shall be elected as needed.
5. All efforts should be made to involve every possible member in committee work. Committees of one are incompatible with the principles of the N.U.C., which bases its activities on mass action and broad collective committee work.
6. Elections for all standing committees and officers shall take place in the local every three or six months as desired by the members themselves. Before the elections, committees should submit a report of their activities which should be thoroughly discussed by the local. Vacancies shall be filled at special elections of the local.

Article VII.

Neighborhood, Ward, Precinct and City Unemployment Councils

1. As rapidly as possible neighborhood, ward, precinct, sectional or city Unemployment Councils should be set up. The Council is a body composed of delegates from the locals, the local unions, fraternal lodges, shops and relief jobs, and from other unemployed organizations existing in the territory. Locals affiliated to a ward or neighborhood Council are represented in the next higher Council by the delegates from such Council, and therefore are not required to send direct and duplicating delegates.
2. It is the task of the neighborhood, sectional, ward, precinct or city Councils to set up locals in all parts of their territory, help direct and coordinate their general activities, furnish them with cards, literature and other supplies of the N.U.C.

3. It is a special task of the neighborhood, sectional, ward and city Councils to form groups of workers in the shops and assist the workers in the shops, industries and unions by aiding them in every action and in all strikes conducted in an effort to defend and improve wage, living and working conditions and standards.
4. The City Unemployment Council shall be a delegated body representing the locals and/or Councils of the N.U.C. within the city, and the corresponding city bodies of the trade unions, fraternal societies, etc. It shall give leadership and guidance in all matters relating to unemployment to all locals and other mass organizations in the respective city. The City Unemployment Council shall meet no less than once a month. It shall elect an executive committee of no less than nine members and no more than fifteen, which shall include the City Organizer, Secretary and Treasurer.

Article VIII.

County Unemployment Council

1. In localities where there are a large number of small towns, County Councils shall be established. This should be done on the initiative of the Unemployed Council in the county seat or largest town or by the State Committee if such exists.
2. A County Conference of all locals and/or city and town Councils of the N.U.C., working class and toiling farmer organizations should be called and constitute the County Unemployment Council. The County Unemployment Council shall be the leading and guiding body of the unemployment locals and all organizations in the respective counties.
3. The County Unemployment Council shall meet no less than once a month. It shall be composed of delegates from corresponding bodies (country) of all working-class organizations and from city and township Councils and of locals that are not represented in an already affiliated central body.
4. A County Executive Committee of the N.U.C. shall be elected of no less than nine and no more than twenty-five members including the County Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen, Secretary and Treasurer. The County Executive shall be responsible for the current work to carry out the decisions of the County Unemployment Council. The County Executive shall meet no less than once every two weeks.
5. The County Unemployment Council shall receive all materials, supplies, literature for its territory from the State Committee, if such exists, or from the National Unemployment Council, and in turn shall relay such supplies to its affiliated units.

6. The County Unemployment Council shall make regular reports on activities, plans, etc., and at least quarterly financial reports to its rank and file and N.U.C.

Article IX.

State Council

1. Where sufficient organization has developed, and conditions indicate the need and possibility for the establishment of a State Unemployment Council, it should, upon the approval of the National Executive Board, be organized through the calling of a State Convention of all locals of the National Unemployment Council, trade unions, etc., following the pattern of the County Unemployment Councils.
2. The Convention shall elect a State Executive Committee of fifteen to thirty-five members, including a State Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen, a Secretary, Organizer and Treasurer. These officers and not more than five additional members shall constitute a Buro. The State Executive Committee is to meet at least once every three months. The State Buro shall meet at least once a month. Where State Unemployment Councils are set up, they shall receive all supplies and material from the National Office to relay to the counties and other subordinate units.

Article X.

United Front with Unions, Negro, Fraternal, Unemployed, Veterans' Organizations, Clubs, Small Home Owners, etc.

1. It is the task of the local, city, county, State and National Committees to induce all working-class organizations in their jurisdiction (such as unions, fraternal, Negro and veterans' organizations, etc.) to set up unemployment committees or locals within their respective organizations and to unite with and affiliate to the Unemployment Council of their community.
2. The task of such unemployment committee is to register the unemployed members of the organization; to organize them into an unemployment local where this is possible; and to take up and act on any grievances arising from unemployment.
3. Every organization that affiliates with the National Unemployment Council shall be required to pay the regular fee for a charter plus such local affiliation fee as may be established by the by-laws of the Council in their city, county and State. Such affiliation constitutes an expression of agreement with and readiness to be governed by the program, Constitution, and aims of the N.U.C. in all matters related to the struggle against unemployment. In all other matters the affiliated organization retains complete autonomy.

4. In accordance with the needs of the workers and the principles of the N.U.C., all affiliated organizations and members are required to promote by every possible means the unity of the workers.
5. Wherever unaffiliated organizations exist side by side with organizations that accept our program in full, our affiliated organizations shall take the initiative in forming a "Federation" which shall be composed of delegates from all the organizations, elected on a basis of proportional representation. Such Federations have the task of effecting the maximum possible unity in action and policy despite organizational independence of the unaffiliated organizations.
6. Organizations that join us only in a united front are to retain their autonomy and organizational independence and are required only to be governed by the conditions on which the given united front is established.
7. In preparing united front conferences and in the course of united front actions, we address ourselves to the recognized officers and leading bodies of other organizations. At the same time, we reserve the right and follow the practice of reaching the rank and file of such organizations with information on our proposals and plans and such differences as develop between the leaders and the U.C.

Article XL.

Finances, Dues, Charters

1. Every member of the N.U.C. shall receive a membership book on payment of five (5) cents initiation to the local treasurer.
2. Membership dues in the N.U.C. shall be not less than two (2) cents per month. Locals may by majority decision increase the local dues. No part of such additional local dues need be shared with any of the higher bodies.
3. Anyone three months or more in arrears in dues payment shall not be considered in good standing.
4. Failure to become a member and remain in good standing shall not disqualify any honest worker from support by the organization when in need of help. Such worker must, however, be required to report to the Grievance Committee and attend the meeting at which decision is to be made on the action to be taken with regard to his grievance. This provision shall not apply in an emergency which requires action before a formal meeting can be held.
5. All workers shall be welcome at meetings of Unemployment Locals and may have a voice in discussions. Only members in good standing shall have the right to a vote.

6. There shall be a strict accounting of all funds — the books being audited by an auditing committee of the rank and file every three months. Funds for official publications and literature shall be kept separate from general funds. Locals, city and county councils shall set up finance committees to work out ways and means of raising and assuring responsible handling of funds needed for the work.

Article XII.

Education

1. Educational Committees shall be set up in the locals and higher bodies for the purpose of training promising militant workers, establishing forums, study circles, and of instituting a series of discussions in the locals through the reading of the National Unemployment Council pamphlets. Research departments should be set up where possible. Tours for National, State, and county speakers and organizers will be organized in conjunction with local Councils.

Article XIII.

Discipline

1. Any member whose conduct is or may be harmful to the National Unemployment Council or any of its sub-divisions, or any other workers' organization, shall be disciplined.
2. Stools, spies, scabs, habitual drunkards, constant disrupters, shall not be admitted to membership or tolerated within the organization. Any known as such shall be exposed and treated with the contempt which is due them.
3. Charges shall be preferred to the Executive Committee which shall report its findings to an open meeting to which the member involved shall be invited. Charges should be made in written form. Appeals may be made to the next higher body up to the National Executive Board whose decision shall be final.

Article XIV.

Women's, Youth and Children's Divisions

1. For the purpose of dealing more effectively with the special problems of these groups, locals and Councils may and should wherever necessary and possible, organize the following auxiliary organizations: (a) Women's, (b) Youth, (c) Children's, groups, clubs or auxiliaries of the Unemployment Council.
2. Such auxiliaries may be chartered and shall operate in all respects in accordance with the program and Constitution of the N.U.C. and the by-laws of the State, County, city and local sub-divisions of which they are a part. They shall, however, develop in addition special

program, activities and procedure to conform to the special needs and problems of such groups.