

COMMENTS ON PROPOSED STRUCTURE
Washington, D.C. Chapter

(Please note that this paper is in response to the structure proposal that came out of the Washington, D.C. NEB meeting, and printed in the December issue of Guild Notes.)

In essence, the proposed new structure for the Guild would place the leadership and direction of the Guild in a National Office collective. The members of this collective would come from various regions of the Guild and would work in the National Office for a period of 18 months. The difficulty with this proposal is that it would vest the leadership in the Guild not in an elected representative leadership but rather in a group of volunteers who are available and willing to work in the Nat'l Office on a full term basis. We do not consider that this is a sound basis on which to choose leadership, since those who are available to volunteer will not necessarily be representative of the Guild. On the contrary it would appear to eliminate from positions of leadership those who are most actively engaged in legal and political work and who are not willing to abandon that work to take a full time position in the Nat'l Office. As a result we may well find ourselves with a leadership which has the least experience in building the Guild and the least knowledge of the legal and political problems facing the Guild.

For this reason, we believe that the primary responsibility for the executive direction of the Guild should be vested in elected officers, a President and several Vice-Presidents, representative of the various regions of the Guild and the various classes of Guild members. The office collective would then work under their direction. This will not minimize the role of the office collective or make it a mere administrative body. Obviously any office collective will, in the nature of things, have and be expected to have a decisive influence on policy. But its ability to carry out policy, to be responsive to the Guild as a whole and reciprocally to have the Guild as a whole be responsive to the National Office will be greatly enhanced, if the basic policy and direction is set by representative elected officials and not by the National office alone.

We appreciate that this proposal will pose the problem of how the elected officials, located all over the country will communicate with each other and with the staff, i.e. , by meetings, by phone, by letter, etc. We believe, however, that if the principle is recognized the necessary machinery for carrying it out will be worked out. In this connection, we note our disagreement with the suggestion in the proposal for new structure that the President be in effect a "figurehead." We see not reason for such a suggestion, except to demean anyone who holds the office. Moreover, we doubt that anyone could be persuaded to take the office on that basis.

We also find the proposal with respect to the role of the National Executive Board to be deficient. The proposal recognizes that since the last convention, there has been no functioning NEB, and comments that as a result there has been a complete discontinuity in the meetings of the NEB, causing a vacuum as to the governing body of the Guild, which apparently has been filled on an ad hoc and private basis. The new proposal, however, really does nothing to meet this problem. We suggest that the only way to obtain a responsible National Executive Board is by the election at the Convention of specifically named individuals to that Board, on the basis of their selection by the various chapters, such individuals to be chosen on a representative and proportionate basis. It should further be made clear that, having been duly elected, the members of the Board have both the responsibility and authority to make decisions for the Guild, either at meetings or by mail votes if deemed necessary for emergency matters; and that meetings of the National Executive Board, although public, are not open ended affairs in which any Guild member (or for that matter non-member or casual passerby) can participate and make decisions for the Guild. This need not and should not prevent the holding of regional meetings in conjunction with or in addition to NEB meetings. However, the two should not be confused. The essential point is that one cannot expect a continuity of attendance and participation at NEB meetings and a responsible application of NEB members to Guild problems unless the membership of the NEB is limited to specifically named individuals and the responsibility and authority of the Board composed of those specifically named individuals is clearly defined.

SOME IDEAS FOR STRUCTURING GUILD MEETINGS

I. PREPARATION FOR MEETINGS:

1. Taking responsibility for agendas: A particular group of people should be given responsibility for preparing an agenda. That group should circulate the agenda, with detailed rationale for contents and perspectives on issues, to people from different geographical areas, for suggestions and criticisms, with a deadline date for these. People who receive agendas ought to take responsibility to offer constructive criticisms and suggestions by the deadline. By deadline time, the agenda should be revised based on the suggestions, and that revision should be final.

2. Leadership responsibility: People preparing the agenda should request certain people to lead discussions: panels, workshops, organizational sessions. These people who will take leadership responsibility should confer with others about how best to run the session: issues to be raised, relevant position papers to be written, problems to solve and possible ideas for solutions. Names, addresses, and telephones of leadership people should be circulated well in advance so that people attending can offer suggestions for format and submit position papers. Leadership people should definitely attend the conference so that they can fulfill their roles at the meeting.

3. Position papers: People with specific ideas for programmatic content, organizational issues and/or political perspectives on these should write these well in advance of the conference, circulate them to all chapters and offices and leadership people, and also bring plenty of extra copies to the conference so that everyone has a chance to read them. We're too big an organization to rely on word-of-mouth information anymore, and we should get in the habit of putting our thoughts on paper in an analytic way so they can be criticized in a principled fashion.

4. People who are attending a Guild conference for the first time should take responsibility for contacting the nearest regional office, or the national office, for agendas, position papers, and for a general understanding of the key organizational and programmatic issues. "Old-timers" to Guild conferences should take responsibility for sharing their information with new-comers, and new-comers should not hesitate to ask questions. Information sharing is a two-way street: those without it have the responsibility to ask; those with it should seek out people with whom to share it.

5. Everyone should come prepared: We should all take responsibility for thinking about the agenda ahead of time, so we won't come empty-headed to the conference hoping that others will provide the ideas. We should all bring pens and paper so we can take notes on meetings to help formulate ideas and questions. Also, thought should be given in advance to the purpose of the specific meetings. Generally, meetings will fall into 3 categories: informational, brainstorming, and/or decision-making. It is especially important for each participant to give advance thought before the latter two types.

II. THE MEETING---STRUCTURE:

Although we should be flexible and experimental in structure, one workable model is the FANSHEN one: for any topic under discussion, a leader is responsible for laying out to the entire group perspectives on the topic, questions to be dealt with and some ideas for solutions or decisions.

Then the group breaks up into small discussion groups, each with a discussion leader who is prepared to deal systematically with the issues raised in the larger previous meeting. Groups might have a mix of people from different geographical areas, small towns and large cities, new people and people who have been around the Guild for some time, and (unless the group is discussing a specific program) people from different areas of interest.

A specific time limit should be set for small group discussions. Between 1/2 and 1 hour should also be set aside at the completion of the discussion for a criticism/self-criticism discussion (see paragraph VI). Thus, a 2-hour meeting might have 1 1/2 hours devoted to the discussion of the issues involved and the final 1/2 hour devoted to a "processing" of the discussion just completed. Although this might seem awkward and unduly structured at first, it is important to allow unspoken feelings and thoughts to emerge, and this structure is designed to meet that need.

Each small group should pick a note-taker who, at smaller gatherings such as N.E.B.'s and Regional Conferences, has the responsibility to report back to the larger meeting by summarizing her/his group's discussion. At a national convention, where there are likely to be dozens of small groups, it will be time-consuming and awkward for each note-taker to report back to the plenary session. In this situation, the note-takers will meet together, compare notes, and present a composite summary of the small group discussions pointing out similarities and differences and providing a context for reaching a decision on the issue.

When a decision has been made, a clearly identifiable group of people should be selected to implement the decision, whether that means communication or development of a program. The burden of implementation need not fall on folks from the national office, but someone from the N.O. should be responsible for receiving and sharing communications from the group, as well as for making suggestions about national coordination, financing, etc., if necessary.

III. THE MEETING---STYLE:

Discussion in both large and small groups should be disciplined. This is the responsibility of both the discussion leader/moderator and of participants. Each person should collect her/his thoughts (here's where pen and paper come in handy) before presenting the ideas to the group, so as to be able to speak clearly and succinctly. The purpose of speaking in our meetings should not be for personal fulfillment, but for communication and sharing of ideas.

Each person has the responsibility to listen with respect and attention to everyone else's ideas. The discussion leader should not allow a small group of people to dominate the discussion. (This can be accomplished by cutting off anyone who speaks too long, or by not calling on the same person to speak until everyone who wants to has had the opportunity to speak.)

The discussion leader should pace the discussion to give plenty of breathing space for people less articulate or shy to be able to formulate and present their ideas.

A common occurrence at meetings is for the same point to be made over and over--either by the same person or many people--and for the conversation to jump all over the place, like a bouncing ball, without a sense of moving forward toward resolution. Although this process seems to fit and be OK in a brainstorming session, it proves to be frustrating for the meeting where a decision has to be made. For these types of discussions, our meetings should not consist simply of individuals getting together to exchange opinions. Discussion requires that, at a certain point, a juxtaposition or polarization of opinions develop. When that point is reached, and understood by all, a decision can be made. We should, therefore, encourage the

formation of "opinion groupings" within any given discussion which will tend to polarize around the issue involved. These informal groups, which are constituted solely on the basis of a likeness of individual opinions, are necessary to the process of the dialogue and should not be viewed as divisive per se. If the law of the unity of opposites works in practice, it creates the possibility of dynamic politics within a framework of general agreement on ultimate ends and values. In discussion, it makes possible debate through a sharp juxtaposition of views, since, in the process, all relevant facts and opinions come to the surface. Once the juxtaposition or polarization of opinions emerges, and each participant is satisfied that this has, in fact, happened, the discussion can then move on toward resolution. It should no longer be necessary for the same opinion to be re-stated. Participants should strive not to "make his or her point" but to seek out the polarities in each issue. "Organization is marked by contradictory elements. Despite the fact that they may be non-antagonistic, this cannot be known until they are brought to a level of consciousness. Analysis, using the theory of contradictions, reveals what and where the contradictions are. But analysis must be followed by behavior. Thus it is imperative that analysis lead to discussion, in which the contradictions can be revealed and resolved. . . . It is only within the individual and among individuals in a group that contradictions become real and can be resolved." (Schurmann, "Ideology & Organization in Communist China, p. 57).

IV. THE MEETING---CONTENT:

The content of Guild meetings should reflect the diverse interests and needs of Guild members, as well as the overall needs of the organization.

There should be space for political discussion, for the sharing of legal information, for presentation and critique of local and national programs, for ideas on local, regional and national organizing, as well as for general organizational business.

There should also be plenty of time and emotional space for reunion with old friends, and for integration of new friends. New people should be introduced and made to feel welcome.

Each person coming to a Guild meeting must be willing to integrate her/his own particular concerns into the overall organizational concerns of the meeting and of the Guild. We must understand that as long as we function as individuals, the Guild, which is all of us, cannot function as a vital, effective organization.

V. THE MEETING---DECISIONS:

The purpose of other than a purely informational meeting is to present a problem, share information and perspectives on the problem, and to reach a decision. We have accomplished something at a meeting of this type when (1) everyone understands the issues clearly, (2) we've made a decision on what to do and how to proceed, and (3) we have selected certain people to implement the decision.

VI. EVALUATING THE MEETING---CRITICISM/SELF-CRITICISM:

This paper assumes that meetings are necessary to the work of the Guild, that they should not be unduly long, but that frequently the organization of the meeting and/or someone's conduct

or attitude is distracting or alienating. After all, racism, authoritarianism and sexism are still very much a part of us. When this happens, the discussion bogs down and people are turned off; the meeting is not as productive as it could and should have been, and the organization, and each participant, suffers. In order to learn how to avoid this, it is helpful to evaluate our meetings in the suggested form of criticism/self-criticism.

Criticism/self-criticism is the opportunity for each of us to talk about the meeting and about those things that did or did not happen which were alienating or counter-productive. Criticism/self-criticism is not trashing another person, nor attacking personality traits in a nit-picking manner, nor shaming someone into changing out of guilt or defensiveness. The process is, purely and simply, to point out the specific conduct or organizational problem which has been counter-productive.

It is useful to evaluate someone's conduct or attitude by specifically pointing out its tangible consequences; that is, specifically, how the conduct or attitude prevented the discussion from moving forward, what specifically happened which alienated someone, etc. Very often, we allow a small incident to become a large one because we are too afraid or liberal to speak up when we see something amiss or when something happens which tangibly affects. We should not restrain ourselves out of fear of hurting someone else's feelings or looking foolish if our criticism is off the mark. This will only serve to hurt us and the organization.

If we criticize another person, we should take into account our responsibility for her or his behavior or for the problem in the program, etc., if appropriate. This is why criticism/self-criticism is most often a mutual process.

The person doing the criticizing has the responsibility to describe the tangible and concrete effects of the person's conduct as specifically as possible, for the purpose of the criticism is to help us see the consequences of our conduct on other people and on the discussion and, of course, to take steps to change. The person being criticized has the responsibility to carefully listen to the criticism and consciously understand it. If it fits, this should be acknowledged. If it does not fit, this should be stated without argument. Criticism is most readily accepted when it is stated clearly and honestly, and when it does not evoke a defensive reaction. Again, the purpose of this process is to help each other and the organization grow by making our meetings more productive and the process of change more conscious and intentional.

Criticism/self-criticism and acknowledging each other's good work (both equally important) are vital parts of the process of learning to respect each other as members of the same struggle. We must make space for, encourage, and refine this process. Differences, or contradictions, between individuals and between individuals and the organization must be aired and, when appropriate, resolved. But the "airing" will not happen if space for the process is not consciously created and if we fail to approach it without the same concentration and dedication we bring to our work.

GUILD OFFICE COMMITTEE REPORT

The Guild Office Committee met on Friday, March 16, 1973, Monday, March 19, 1973, and Monday, March 26, 1973, to consider the following questions with the following recommendations:

1. Should the Guild continue to maintain a referral system, and if so, what should the referral fee schedule be?

The members of the committee contacted several of the Guild attorneys who have received the largest share of the referral cases. It was the feeling of those attorneys that the system should be continued. Toward that end, the committee recommends that when there is a request for an attorney to perform fee-generating work, the Guild office refer those cases to Guild attorneys. Since it is now unethical for lawyers to give referral fees to referring attorneys without the referring attorney doing work consistent with the fee, it was felt that this system should be worked on an informal basis. A letter will be sent to the attorneys receiving the cases so that they may place in their file the note that this case was referred by the Guild. Hopefully, when the case is concluded and a fee is received, a donation will be made to the Guild.

2. Should the Guild continue to respond to informational calls?

It was felt that the Guild, at the present time, does not have the resources to provide this service to the public at

large. Therefore, we have recommended that informational calls not be forwarded to attorneys and generally discouraged.

3. What additional equipment should be purchased to assist the Guild staff in the mailings?

Presently, the Guild office has a gestetener and a folder. It is recommended that we buy, on time, an addressograph, approximately \$29.00 plus tax a month, to assist the Guild staff in putting out mailings (\$1,000.00 over four years). We can use our bulk permit to imprint a first class designation on all mailings which will ease the stamping process in mailings. We have decided not to purchase the \$800.00 gestofax electric stencil because of financial reasons.

4. Newsletter vs. Newspaper.

The newsletter approach was preferred by the committee. The newsletter is to contain the following items: a secretary's summary of the general membership meeting; a national summary; regional summary; committee reports, those reports to consist of short informational paragraphs on what the committee has done; and dates of proposed future meetings. In addition, the luncheon mailing, to the extent that the luncheon is continued, will be merged into the newsletter mailing which will come out once a month.

5. Luncheons.

The committee was not satisfied that the present format, time or location of the luncheon was satisfactory, and recommends that a closer examination of regular monthly luncheons be held by

the general meeting. Some of the thoughts which were expressed by the committee were:

(a) That the luncheon should be once a week in the afternoon to provide a forum for exchanging ideas within the Guild on topics of current interest, i.e., no-fault, wire-tapping, household workers, etc.

(b) Once a week in the evening because it is easier to attend an evening meeting than in the afternoon.

(c) That the discussions essentially be political in that the Guild does not have a forum to discuss political questions at length.

(d) That it be an internal discussion period in order that questions involving the Guild chapter be discussed at length.

(e) That it be a lecture series of a higher plane than is now discussed at the luncheon meetings with possible outside guest speakers.

(f) That it be a dialogue and/or a debate of competing points of view within the Guild.

None of the above is exclusive, but merely presented to give the general membership the benefit of the alternatives which the committee raised.

6. Staff salary and its relationship to the Guild membership.

It is recommended that the Guild staff person receive \$100.00 per week in salary, and \$20.00 per week travel expenses. The Guild staff should meet with each committee to discuss the staff's roll in the office in regard to the new committee struc-

ture. The committee felt strongly that each committee chair person place this item on their agenda so that the staff person can better relate and respond to the committee and vice versa.

7. Student roomers at 715 East Grand Boulevard - Tabled

8. Student chapter put into National Lawyers Guild -
Tabled.

Submitted by,

Mike Adleman
Jessica Cooper
Sam Galici
Sam Karfonta
Tom Meyer
Dick Soble