

MEMORANDUM

of

NATIONAL BOARD AND EASTERN DISTRICT BOARD

Whenever The Nature Friends are faced with serious problems which are bound to create dissension or friction among its members, it is essential for the proper solution of the matter in question to review the purpose of our movement as laid down by its founders and to analyze carefully its history and present status.

Only with the consideration of the basic factors of the purpose of our existence as an organization will we be able to outline a course for the future which will safeguard our present holdings and guarantee further expansion of the organization in the United States.

Due to the political indifference of a small number of members, and as a result of ideological influences strange to the labor movement in general and American liberal thought in particular, many of the simple problems we are faced with, easily have become artificial major problems of the Nature Friends.

Therefore, the officers of the National Council and of the Eastern District Executive Board, in joint conference have undertaken to survey the situation and propose to the membership of the Nature Friends of America, the following memorandum, which should serve as the basis for the status and activities of the organization in the future:-

The Nature Friends movement originated in Europe, founded by workers and intellectuals for the purpose of giving organized labor something besides their economic and political institutions - a means of maintaining a physical and cultural education. Starting as a small hiking and rambling group, these groups developed, and before many years had passed at the end of the last century, they were huge organized centers of recreational activities. They added to their hiking and mountaineering weekends and vacation times, regular weekly city activities which in its cultural ambitions and successes received in many countries the approval of the leading labor organizations and governmental agencies. This made the Nature Friends one of the finest of labor organizations in their countries. Nature Friends were the pioneers in the practical solution of a problem which today has become one of the most vital concerns of every nation - the physical and cultural recreation of the laboring masses.

Traveling Nature Friends from Europe and emigrants were the founders of our movement in North America about thirty years ago.

The composition of the Nature Friends of America was at first, quite naturally, predominantly German speaking. This reflected the fact that the International Organization was born and grew to manhood in German-speaking countries and that the American founders emigrated from such countries. Their first approach to members was to their countrymen, for on that basis they were insured of the possibility of creating an organization that would express the ideals and background of the parent bodies in the old world.

So long as immigration into this country from Central Europe continued, the membership grew apace on the basis described, for the reason that it was desirable for these immigrants to band together in fraternal groups that expressed their culture.

Changes occurred that made its mark on the development of the Nature Friends. Firstly, immigration increasingly declined, hence, the body of recruits to membership could no longer be the same. Secondly, the members of the Nature Friends continually acclimatized themselves to the American scene and the persons who once regarded themselves as countrymen of the old world now became real Americans culturally as well as legally.

The picture of the Nature Friends shows a process of change as inherently American as the nation itself. America has long been described as a melting pot of nations. So is the Nature Friends. The mark of any one nation loses its existence in the fusion of nationalities. The Nature Friends became Americanized and an American group - its members no longer predominantly Germans but German-Americans.

This is by no means different from similar changes that took place in every country where the Nature Friends is in existence. Each Landesleitung is a national group and expresses its own national culture although all have preserved the original N F ideals, traditions and customs. Because the N F movement originated in Austria was no reason that in Germany the group should have been Austrian or that in France it should have been German, etc.

In America, the Nature Friends sped to activity on the basis of love for the out-of-doors, and hiking and camping became an organized enterprise. The facilities in America, including trails and camping sites were explored to their fullest extent and to an appreciable degree were developed by Nature Friends. They erected camps in thorough style and improved them to the point that today we have almost a score of camps - a veritable monument to the aims and ideals of the Nature Friends.

Outdoor sports likewise became an essential activity with group participation in swimming, tennis, fist ball, etc. American sports were added to the list and the N F played an important role in introducing European winter sports - not yet very popular in this country, but destined to grow in public appeal.

This fraternal group of workers demanded a cultural form of expression when outdoor activity was not possible and this was the cause for the creation of Culture Groups such as photo groups, chess and checker, drama, dance, music, study and other groups.

In retrospect this is especially interesting in the light of present governmental sponsorship of similar groups. Today one can join such highly specialized groups under expert and professional guidance without cost because the government has provided these avenues of expression in a progressive social campaign. In the early days of the N F, these groups were formed and maintained as forerunners to such wide and progressive changes and this shows the progressive need of N F members and the wide awokeness of its leaders who helped them achieve such groups. In the United States, the Nature Friends were really pioneers in the conduct of groups and activities which our government now sponsors under the WPA.

From the very beginning, the N F displayed a vital interest in things not alone connected with nature, but also in the world that these workers lived in ie: their social, economic and political surroundings. This was manifested by participation in trade unions, political parties and mass groups. Assistance and aid was given in strikes - support and contributions were given to all organized activity allied with progressive labor motives.

From the beginning of its history, the Nature Friends in America have given significant expression to the need so ably announced by our International President Moser in 1938 - to display interest not only in the beauties of nature but also a vital interest in all problems affecting workers and mankind.

Through the years the N F in America has been a staunch fighter for workers interest. Today it is foremost in the fight against Fascism - in the defense and protection of American ideals - democracy and liberty.

But in this development it has always sought to retain a non-partisan status. Today there can be no doubt that the N F, although affiliated with the International Nature Friends, composed of organizations in various countries, each true to its national cultures and customs, is bound to no outside force and control. No groups, no parties and no cliques can rule or influence. The membership remains the only force. At the Conventions in the East in 1935 and 1936, the National Board introduced a report that was un-animously accepted, calling for the absolute termination of any attempted political domination - the abolition of all factions and rump groups whether of party or left wing influence. It also called for the unity of all members within the ranks of the N F for the success of democracy.

These factors could have had no other effect than to proclaim the N F as an important adjunct to the outdoor, cultural and social life of workers.

Membership of the organization has increased to the extent that today the NF is the largest organization of its kind in America. No other hiking and outdoor group - not of a professional nature can boast of such organized activity with such numbers joined in hiking and camping.

Nevertheless, it is true that the number of members in the N F have not by any means reached as large a figure as might be desired. There is need for increasing our membership rolls before the N F can properly be described as a mass organization.

This must by no means be confused with any thought that we are small in influence or isolated from the masses of the people. Such a construction is as untrue as it is dangerous.

In point of fact the last few years have seen the N F achieve an influence and prestige far and beyond that which would be suggested by their numbers.

A great measure of credit is due our magazine published monthly. Through this medium, we have reached our own members as well as their friends. The publication is kept on file in libraries and institutions; it is known to the publishing trade and is listed in the trade magazines. Our name is well known to the passenger agents and officials of railroads who have even co-operated with us in obtaining material for our magazine. We are known to newspapers such as the New York Times, who also have given us assistance with our magazine.

From the viewpoint of association with other outdoor groups, we are in friendly contact with the Audubon Societies, largest bird organization in America, and they, too, have given us tremendous help in material for our publications; so too have various museums.

We have been active in trail associations and in friendly collaboration with almost all the hiking organization in existence.

Sports outfitters have recognized the N F as a large hiking, camping and sports organization and we are known to the largest supply houses and winter-sports establishments.

Members of our organization have been recognized as authorities in their fields and have written for publications with a nation-wide circulation. It was due to our prestige and reputation as a hiking and camping organization, that we have received invitations to publicize our activities in newspapers and leading magazines and one such magazine carried a detailed story of the NF and its activities as a road to workers' health. This story, published and circulated throughout the United States, resulted in requests for information from all parts of the nation.

Our position as a ranking outdoor organization was furthermore the reason why representatives of the NF were asked to speak on NF hiking and camping over radio stations, and on three occasions such addresses were given over a municipally controlled and operated radio station.

There can be no doubt that these efforts have had a tremendous effect in awakening renewed interest in outdoor sports, in hiking and camping as a premier American recreation. The NF can accept a full measure of responsibility and credit for this achievement, for without question its years of work have had significant effect in this phase of education of the American people. This influence may not have been proportionately accompanied by membership increases in our ranks, but no one can truthfully gainsay or deny the existence of our prestige and our progressive influence in helping make American masses more outdoor conscious.

But times and conditions have changed during the years of the development of the NF, as well in economic and social spheres as in outdoor fields and to meet these changes it is quite natural to expect new forms of adaptation. These new methods of adaptation came almost by themselves and are the result of the trend of the people.

In the NF organization there are many who with increasing frequency survey the organization, its members and their activities and who unaccustomed to the scenes they see, recall the years gone by. The questions raised are: Is the NF a hiking or camping organization? Why do people go hiking less and are more contented to go to camps? Why do they use their automobiles more? Why is it necessary to have an increasing influx of members? Why should not the organization and its property be reserved for those who created it? These and similar questions raise continuous problems.

Neither error nor truth rests only with one side. But a reflection upon the original ideals of the NF in the light of the conditions of today show that without doubt we are following a necessary course of development. An outdoor organization, combining the activities desired by the people, with a plan of unrelenting action to preserve the liberty and freedom of the people was and still is the torch and guide to action of the NF.

Hiking can not always be the same when aids increase and possibilities unfold. Short railroad trips give way to the use of the automobile. State parks and government camps have been developed and must also change the type of hiking activities. Not all workers are capable of the same strenuous activity and short hikes must be present for those. Expense and time must necessarily reflect on hiking also.

The aim is to develop love of nature and to attempt to enforce this by one type of activity alone can be an unconscious form of organized oppression. To encourage love of the out-of-doors requires elastic methods suitable to the lives of the people and their needs. After long working hours, workers require vacations, rest and the refreshment of nature. Camps and camping can fill this need more adequately than anything else. Hence the popularity of camps. It offers an opportunity to relax, to imbibe nature, to reflect and to rest. When the camps are inexpensive, they are doubly attractive to workers. Quite naturally they all do not join in hiking, yet their love and need for the out-of-doors may be just as great.

In these surroundings they may learn the principle of fraternity of workers, the unity of fellow-men, the traditions and beauties of their country - the unquenchable thirst for freedom and the undauntable desire to protect liberty and democracy.

Nature and the out-of-doors will teach them harmony, beauty, purity - it will show them freedom and light. On the success of this will we achieve the termination of selfishness, bitterness, fraternal strife, the obliteration of race prejudice and unforgiveable selfish conflicts. This is what the N F sought to achieve from the first day it was founded and they knew they could do it by the teachings of the out-of-doors. The exact manner of activity did not matter - that was the choice of the people, the surroundings and the times - the sole necessity was the lesson of Nature - the out-of-doors.

The proof of this is demonstrated by the history and development of the N F - hiking in mountainous Bavaria had a different form from hiking on the plains of Schleswig. Holland resorts to bicycles. France and Belgium resort more frequently to boating and bicycle trips than to foot hikes.

In America, we resort to all the types of outdoor activities that the masses of the people desire and if camping should predominate, it would be because that is the need of the masses of the people. Educate them in all other activities as well, in hiking, skiing, skating, swimming, ball playing and a hundred other activities, if we can.

NF campers are and must be considered equally worthy to long distance N F hikers. The disdain and disrespect that grows from knowledge of physical superiority or more advanced knowledge of woodlore is no more worthy or proletarian than disrespect for lower paid workers or workers of different color, race or creed.

Nature Friends stand for workers' recreation. Yesterday it may have been one form of hiking. Today it may be another - or it may be camping or something else. It changes with the wants of workers. That is not of prime importance.

The crying need is to organize workers as a giant group - an American group - for the defense of themselves and ourselves through fraternity and unity against fascism - for democracy and liberty.

This cannot be done through small select clubs - through elite circles - it must be done by mass organizations - through huge numbers. The founders will teach the newcomers the lessons of nature which they have already learned. Without the masses we will have fascism - with them we will keep democracy. By being a mass organization, we become an instrument of the American defense of democracy.

Those who attack our role as a mass organization are false to the workers' trust in the masses and are equally false to the ideals of the N F, for they are trying to limit the N F invitation to fraternity and are working contrary to mass organization ideology.

Cynical reference is also raised to the success of our mass organization policies in view of the comparatively small membership. This would not be if dissent was washed aside and our ranks unifiedly worked for the necessary goal. So long as locals insist upon building Chinese Walls around their organizations and increase the difficulty of joining the organization, they will discourage workers from joining our side and working with us as one for the goal of N F and humanity.

The solution and the answer requires us to urge and welcome the masses of the people to join our ranks - to educate them in the ways of Nature - to make the invitation to the out-of-doors attractive. New members are the carriers of our ideology and are not to be considered as our enemies. The N F movement in France has grown so rapidly that the majority of the members are all new. In 1937 the French N F had 29 locals - today they have 64.

That is the answer - numbers and masses engaged in activities of Nature that weld them as one in free and open traditions of the out-of-doors and that unity of one will smash fascism and save democracy for America and the world.

FOLLOWING: CONCRETELY, THE JOINT ASSEMBLY PROPOSES THE

- (1) A drive for increase in membership.
 - (a) Constant circularization of information about the N F through leaflets, literature, etc.
 - (b) Personal contacts in unions and their organizations, etc.
 - (c) Constantly working together with large progressive undertakings.
 - (d) Working together with trail conferences, hiking associations, etc.
- (2) Greater education in hiking and camping and outdoor sports by setting up schools or groups for the development of hike leaders, and for the intensification of out-of-door activities.
 - (a) Improvement of hiking through education and study.
 - (b) Camping to be utilized as progressive recreation. Education to be combined with sports. Camp to be utilized as a hike base.
 - (c) Facilities in our camps to be developed progressively - re: Developing them along American methods with privacy and comfort stressed.
- (3) To end discrimination against new members, whether by regulations of locals, unfair racial prejudice or otherwise.
- (4) To adhere to decisions of past conventions for the termination of influence by outside factions or cliques and to drive for an unified and democratic N F.
- (5) To appoint a committee for the investigation of the possibilities for closer contact with the A F of L and the CIO and their affiliated unions.
- (6) Cooperation for existing trail conference or other sport and outdoor organizations, state departments and WPA for the purpose of developing and fostering outdoor life and activities of the N F.