

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 13

**Aims and Philosophy of the
Citizens League**

July 1953

A STATEMENT ABOUT
THE PURPOSE OF THE AIMS AND PHILOSOPHY COMMITTEE

The Citizens League, its organization, generous reception, and continued growth, bear witness to the desire of many citizens to take active part in the improvement of their government when they believe that the organization through which they work has a non-partisan policy based on objective investigation.

The continued good health of the Citizens League will depend on the objectives it pursues, the methods it uses, and the members who support it. The Committee on Aims and Philosophy has sought in its meetings to concern itself with these general influences to the end that the Citizens League will continue to work for the general interest of our citizens and thus not challenge the special interest of any body of them.

This committee has sought convictions which are common to the individuals within the Citizens League and which advance the general interest of all citizens.

Report One is submitted for discussion in the belief that common objectives and methods must be established to more clearly state the nature of the League to those interested in it and to give some assurance to its members about the general direction of its operations. It is, we feel, a practical requirement of the situation within which the League is working.

The Citizens League, by its existence, is dedicated to change-- change of a kind which recognizes that to conserve the good is as important as to abolish the bad and that to be a critic of government method without offering constructive alternatives is to weaken society, not strengthen it.

Change requires decisions. Decisions require fundamental values. We come to grips with values whenever we consider a change - and judge what to conserve, refine, or abolish. It is a condition of life that we must operate from general propositions of value whether we are aware of them or not. As this is true of individuals so, also, is it true of organizations. Voluntary organizations require agreement among individual members as to purpose and methods if they are to endure. In the absence of force, only agreement as to conviction can keep individuals working together under the strain of opposition to what they are doing.

The committee is aware that convictions are more than words. Our beliefs, and the values on which they are based, are more clearly represented by what we do than by what we say. We may use words to deceive even ourselves.

Therefore, Reports Two and Three, which are submitted for discussion, are the beginning of a series of proposals on procedures and activities which seem to the committee to incorporate principal into action.

It is our procedures and activities, as much as our objectives, which will decide the kind of member who will continue to work with the League. And it is the member on which the success of this enterprise depends.

What kind of individual is needed as a member of the Citizens League? To become a positive force behind the League, an individual must operate on certain assumptions. A non-partisan organization founded on objective research requires members who believe that there is a reasonable, systematic way in which men can live together; that we can best achieve this method by investigation, analysis, and persuasion, not by revelation, commands and force. An organization interested in local government requires members who feel an identification with the community and attach importance to its success. An aggressive organization requires members with additional personal qualities: initiative, intellectual curiosity, pride in their individuality, but, nevertheless, a willingness to blunt their own desires in return for the constructive aid of their fellow-men. The League needs such members in numbers if it is to be a continuing success.

What will such members require of the organization? Will they continue in the Citizens League if they suspect partisanship? If they are not consulted? If they are asked to support a course of action on which their opinion is not developed? It is not likely! Yet they may find these conditions innocently existing unless we occasionally consider the objectives, procedures, and activities of the League.

Your Committee on Aims and Philosophy has looked to a League expanding with the power such individuals bring with them. It submits the following three reports to the board for discussion, to be implemented as the Board sees fit.

Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis
Committee on Aims and Philosophy

REPORT ONE

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

Foreword

This report attempts to state a consensus as to what are the objectives and methods of the Citizens League.

At present, the statement of aims is found in Section (2) of the Articles of Incorporation. Which reads:

"The purposes of the corporation are:

To investigate, study and disseminate information concerning governmental affairs of Minneapolis and the surrounding metropolitan area;

To promote the honest and efficient performance of governmental functions;

To encourage the choice of competent officials;

To promote the welfare of the citizens."

For a number of reasons the committee felt that this statement did not fully represent the League's objectives. It is not possible to go into all of the reasons the committee found for making a re-statement of aims desirable. However, it may be worthwhile, for purposes of orientation, to list a few of them.

- a) The principal idea which people have been given about the League is that it is a non-partisan organization. It was felt by the committee that this had not been given sufficient emphasis in the articles.
- b) The present purposes seem to limit the League, in the opinion of the committee. For example, to limit ourselves to the question of "honest and efficient performance of government" is to neglect the question: Does government serve the needs of the community? An answer to this question has already been found to be essential in one committee's study of a governmental activity.⁽¹⁾
- c) One of the stated purposes, "to promote the welfare of the

(1) The Health, Hospitals and Welfare Committee in their Factual Report As To Work of the Committee headed section IV as "Community Needs." They noted on page 7: "No one can lose sight of the fact that establishing 'what is being done' does not of itself answer 'what should be done'." This sub-committee is now in the process of determining what the unmet needs of the community are.

citizens" seemed to have such broad implication that there is likely to be very little agreement as to what it means.

In summary, the general attitude of the committee is that the present statement of purpose is inadequate to the needs of the League; it does not represent the opinion of the committee and thus it is likely that it does not represent the opinion of the board or membership; since the statement of purpose does not represent either a guide to action or general agreement, a restatement is required.

This restatement is included in report one, part one. In Part Two of the report the changes in the articles are indicated which would be necessary to implement this restatement of objectives and methods.

Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis
Committee on Aims and Philosophy

REPORT ONE

(Part One)

CONCLUSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE
AS TO THE LEAGUE'S PURPOSES

Central Objective

The Citizens League is a non-partisan effort to benefit the whole community by encouraging good local government.

Supporting Objectives

This objective will include - but will not be limited by - the following:

1. To develop the initiative of the individual citizen by increasing his knowledge of and activity in matters concerning local governmental affairs.
2. To promote the honest and efficient performance of governmental functions.
3. To encourage the choice of competent officials.
4. To encourage the adaptation of government to the needs of the citizens.

Methods

The objectives of an organization and the methods by which they are achieved cannot be separated. The methods which the Citizens League will use in order to be consistent with the objectives will be the following:

1. The objective investigation and the general dissemination of information concerning governmental affairs of Minneapolis and Hennepin County.
2. The encouragement of the study and discussion of local governmental affairs by the citizens.
3. The recognition and support of effective, efficient local governmental activities.
4. The development of proposals to improve local government and the encouragement of popular support for them.
5. The achievement of all our objectives through democratic procedures.

REFERENCE: Proposed changes in Articles of Incorporation

Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis
Committee on Aims and Philosophy

REPORT ONE

(Part Two)

PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

Proposal I: That action should be taken to drop from the Articles of Incorporation Section (2) which now reads:

"The purposes of the corporation are:
to investigate, study and disseminate information concerning governmental affairs of Minneapolis and the surrounding metropolitan area;

To promote the honest and efficient performance of governmental functions;

To encourage the choice of competent officials;

To promote the welfare of the citizens."

And that action should be taken to include the following objective, supporting objectives, and methods:

Central Objective

The Citizens League is a non-partisan effort to benefit the whole community by encouraging good local government.

Supporting Objectives

This objective will include - but will not be limited by - the following:

1. To develop the initiative of the individual citizen by increasing his knowledge of and activity in matters concerning local governmental affairs.
2. To promote the honest and efficient performance of governmental functions.
3. To encourage the choice of competent officials.
4. To encourage the adaptation of government to the needs of the citizens.

Methods

The objectives of an organization and the methods by which they are achieved cannot be separated. The methods which the Citizens League will use in order to be consistent with the objectives will be

the following:

1. The objective investigation and the general dissemination of information concerning governmental affairs of Minneapolis and Hennepin County.
2. The encouragement of the study and discussion of local governmental affairs by the citizens.
3. The recognition and support of effective, efficient local governmental activities.
4. The development of proposals to improve local government and the encouragement of popular support for them.
5. The achievement of all our objectives through democratic procedures.

Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis
Committee on Aims and Philosophy

REPORT TWO

(PART ONE)

DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURE

Foreword

The committee is concerned in this report with ways of implementing Method Four, as set forth in Report One: "The Achievement of all our objectives through democratic procedures."

The submission of this report may seem premature, since it is submitted along with Report One, which has not been approved. However, it is submitted at the same time in order that the board might get a clearer impression of its committee's thinking on this method. A word such as "democratic" runs the risk of becoming purely evocative without some concrete proposals to give it form.

The question of democratic procedures was considered first by the committee for several reasons. If there were to be any changes in organizational procedures, it was our opinion that they needed to be established early in the life of the League before other complications arose. In addition, fireside speakers reported that potential members often inquired as to how they, as individual members, might initiate action. This suggested that membership recruitment would be served. Finally, it was the committee's opinion, after examining its suggested Methods, that there has not been sufficient attention given, as yet to some areas of League activity. While it was noted that objective investigation (Method One) has taken form and proposals to improve local government are being developed (Method Three), equal attention has not yet been given to insuring the use of democratic procedures (Method Four) and to the encouragement of study and discussion (Method Two). Therefore, this report and Report Three are designed to coordinate more closely the League's performance with these latter two methods.

The essential question in applying democratic procedure to the League organization was this: Where shall the power of action rest? This is a reoccurring question in human organizations. The problem is clearly illustrated on the world stage where we may observe the two extremes of anarchy and totalitarianism. One of complete individualism and no delegation of power, the other of complete central control and complete delegation of power. It is within the continuum that exists between the two that we seek an organizational structure that is responsive to its members and yet is not hobbled into inaction.

In considering the League organization against a standard of democratic method, the committee considered some of the traditional topics which have become basic to any discussion of democratic procedures. Premises, and the supporting reasons for them, are included in Part One of this report. The Committee has suggested some changes to the by-laws, related to these premises, in Part Two of the report.

Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis
Committee on Aims and Philosophy

REPORT TWO

(PART ONE)

PREMISE ONE

SUBJECT: Individual participation in decisions of the Citizens League.

REASONING:

The Citizens League will flourish if the individual members know that they are an integral part of the organization with real power to influence the policy of the organization Because:

1. The Citizens League is a voluntary organization. It depends on the individual's consent that he become a member. It cannot use subtle or overt coercion. Therefore, the emotional and intellectual needs of the individual member must be served if he is to renew his membership. It seems probable that by natural selection the membership of the Citizens League will tend to have initiative and independence and that it will insist on genuine policy-making power through responsive, representative groups.
2. The individual is inclined to feel apathetic about government, because there seems to be a great gap between its power and his power to change it. This creates an attitude of mind that gives quick credence to inside stories of wrongdoings by public officials. One of the emotional needs the Citizens League will be called upon to fill is to reduce that sense of impotency, That can only be done if the individual feels he has some power in the Citizens League which eventually will have its effect on government.
3. The individual in the United States has been educated in the democratic ideal. In our society fair and adequate representation is considered right. It will be hard for people to think well of an organization that does not seem representative.
4. At the same time, it should be recognized that to insist on the vote of the membership for every policy-making verdict can lead to indecision and inaction. Actions which must be taken promptly cannot always wait for the approval of a large number of people unable or unwilling to become adequately informed on the matter at hand. Great care must be taken that procedures do not limit power to act when action is in the best interest of the total membership nor should procedures permit the uninterested portion of the membership to stop action by its inertia.

Therefore:

Individual participation in decisions of the Citizens League must be encouraged wherever practicable.

REFERENCE: Proposed By-Law Amendment; Proposal No. 1
Proposed By-Law Amendment; Proposal No. 2
Proposed By-Law Amendment; Proposal No. 3

PREMISE TWO

SUBJECT: The responsibility of boards and committees to the membership.

REASONING:

The representative structure should be as responsive as possible to the membership.

1. The shoe pinches the foot that wears it. Every man is an expert in how the government affects him. Therefore, every member has something to offer the Citizens League from out of his unique experience. "Only so much I know as I have lived," said Ralph Waldo Emerson. The value of this experience will be gained by the Citizens League only if board and committees are responsive to the membership.
2. The Citizens League is placed under a moral burden by insisting on publicity and information on the action of public officials. Similar methods for keeping representatives responsive to the people they represent should be used in the Citizens League. It would be difficult to reconcile the lack of courage of Citizens League representatives with the demand of the Citizens League on public representatives if similar methods of fixing responsibility are not used.
3. The individual voter for candidates for Citizens League office has a right to receive the same information on the candidates that the Citizens League insists is valuable for his choice of public officials. We belittle a man's intelligence if we assume that he can vote as well for a name as he can vote for the name, background and views of the candidate.
4. The Citizens League ruling that board members cannot succeed themselves after a three year term creates a situation in which the board candidate does not have a board record to guide the voter. The traditional argument for responsibility of board members does not hold when it is said that a board member must pay attention to the wishes of the membership if he wants to remain on the board; for under the typical circumstances created by the present rules, he will not be able to come up for re-election.

Therefore:

Those procedures which have been established in public bodies to fix responsibility and make representatives truly responsive should be considered for use in the Citizens League.

REFERENCE: Proposed By-Law Amendment, Proposal No. 4
Proposed By-Law Amendment, Proposal No. 5
Proposed By-Law Amendment, Proposal No. 6

PREMISE THREE

SUBJECT: Protection of the rights of the majority and the minority.

REASONING:

1. The majority should rule. The Citizens League will flourish if the minority is encouraged to give free expression to its opinion.
2. Given an opportunity to voice its opinion, the minority will be less likely to withdraw.
3. Minority opinion is a tempering influence if granted full publicity. If lack of harmony is recognized rather than hidden, there is more likely to be an effort by the majority to achieve agreement.
4. If minority opinion is voiced, the majority must make doubly sure that theirs is the wisest course of action before starting on it.

Therefore:

The majority should have its right to rule safeguarded; while those who are of a minority opinion should have equal opportunity with the majority to publicity within the organization of their position.

REFERENCE: Proposed By-Law Amendments; Proposal No. 7
Proposed By-Law Amendments; Proposal No. 8

Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis
Committee on Aims and Philosophy

REPORT TWO

PART TWO

PROPOSED BY-LAW AMENDMENTS
OF
CITIZENS LEAGUE OF GREATER MINNEAPOLIS

Your Committee on Aims and Philosophy proposes the following amendments be made to the By-Laws, in order to implement the report of the Committee.

Each of the proposed amendments relates to a particular portion of the report, and will, by reference, show what particular portion of the report suggests each By-Law amendment.

PROPOSAL NO. 1

That Article III of the By-Laws be amended by adding a section to be known as Section 10, and to read as follows:

"All Board meetings shall be open to the general membership."

PROPOSAL NO. 2

That Article II, Section 1 of the By-Laws be amended, by adding thereto the following phrase:

"subject, however, to the limitation provided in Article II,
Section 2, of these By-Laws."

PROPOSAL NO. 3

That Article II, Section 2, of the By-Laws be amended so that the requirement for not less than 100 petitioners be reduced to 50.

PROPOSAL NO. 4

That there be added to Article III an additional section to be known as Section 11, reading as follows:

"The Board shall, wherever practicable, publicly invite participation by interested members in hearings with respect to any public issue prior to the final adoption of the position on such issue by the Board."

PROPOSAL NO. 5

That there be added to Article III an additional section to be known as Section 12, reading as follows:

"All actions taken by the Board with respect to any public issue shall be by recorded vote. The vote on such final action of the Board concerning public issue shall be published. After action by the Board on any such public issue, a member of the Board shall be designated by the President to set forth the views of the Board with respect to any changes it may make in any committee report after the receipt of which such action was taken, and a copy thereof shall be sent to the Chairman of such committee. One-third of the Board, of not less than five in number, present and voting at any meeting, shall have the right to call for a referendum to decide the stand of the Citizens League on any public issue. This referendum shall be held at a general meeting, or by mail, as a majority of those directors present and voting shall determine. A majority of votes cast in such referendum shall be binding on the Board."

PROPOSAL NO. 6

That Article IV of the By-Laws be amended by adding the following to Section 4 of said Article:

"Such mail ballot shall contain a report by the Election Committee giving the background of each candidate for the Board. Such statement shall be uniform with respect to each candidate, and shall approximate the form of the reports to the public on candidates for City and County offices insofar as practical."

PROPOSAL NO. 7

That Article VIII of the By-Laws dealing with committees shall be amended by adding thereto the following sections:

"Section 2. Committee reports on public issues shall be handled in the following manner: A short published form of the majority and minority reports shall be made by the staff in consultation with the writers of such reports and published in the house organ following the acceptance of the committee report by the Board. A standard policy for such reports shall be established for use in the organizational News Bulletin; the necessity for a majority report and the right of a minority report shall be recognized in all committees dealing with public issues; members of committees with minority reports shall be required to make their reports at the same time that the majority reports are made to the Board, and both such reports shall indicate the vote of each member of the committee.

"Section 3: The President shall appoint members of committees dealing with public issues only with the advice and consent of the Board."

Proposal No. 8

Add a By-law provision as follows:

"To encourage members to submit questions of policy and proposals for actions directly to the Board of Directors, the written questions and proposals received by the officers or Staff of the League shall be placed on the agenda of the next Board meeting for consideration and action by the Board. The Members shall be informed of the disposition of their questions or proposals."

Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis
Committee on Aims and Philosophy

REPORT THREE

FOREWORD

The committee is concerned in this report with ways of implementing Method Two, as set forth in Report One: "The encouragement of the study and discussion of local government affairs by the citizens."

It is submitted along with Report One, even though that report has not been approved, in order that the board might get a clearer impression of its committee's thinking on this method.

It is designed to coordinate more closely the League's performance with Method Two. Our premise, and the supporting reasons for it, are included in Part One. Part Two includes the Committee's proposal for action at this time.

REPORT THREE

PART ONE

ACTIVITIES

SUBJECT: Educational activities of the Citizens League.

REASONING:

There are many results from educational discussion groups which would prove advantageous to the Citizens League.

1. It is the experience of many people who have taken part in popular action organizations that sustained action over a period of time requires the active understanding of a large number of people. The present committees doing primary investigation and policy reports will always be limited. Opportunity for membership participation in them will be limited. There is no limit to the number of people who can be involved in education discussion groups.
2. Primary investigation committee work results in specialized knowledge on a limited subject for the individual member. The success of the Citizens League depends also on the broad understanding of many aspects of government by the large body of our membership.
3. Educational discussion groups develop a more informed and effective group of citizens. It has been demonstrated by experimental studies that college students retain more knowledge from discussions in which they have participated than from speeches or reading material.
4. The Citizens League must persuade people to accept new ways of doing things in government. Yet studies of human attitudes suggests that, when listening to arguments in speeches or in reading written material, many people have a strong tendency to perceive,

not what is said or written, but what they want to perceive. Therefore, if the Citizens League is to change opinion, it must not rely on the simple, more authoritarian methods of informing its members, but must also rely on free discussion.

5. Education groups provide a recruitment agency that will encourage new members on the basis of older established loyalties -- neighborhood, church, civic organization, union, business, etc.
6. Discussion is a good method for learning the real interests and special knowledge of the membership. This information will be more and more important as investigating committees are increased and expanded.

Therefore:

The organization of an educational program along the lines of the program of the League of Women Voters, the Adult Education Association and others - with special attention to the educational opportunities that lie in television - should be investigated and put into action as soon as possible.

Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis
Committee on Aims and Philosophy

REPORT THREE

Part Two

Proposed Motion To Be
Placed Before The Board

A committee shall be appointed to report as soon as possible on the feasibility of a Citizens League study and discussion program on local governmental affairs. This investigation should include:

Experience of educational programs and discussion groups in other organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the Adult Education Association.

The nature of suitable programs for the League, with attention to personnel, costs to the League, the likelihood of obtaining outside funds, and possible use of television.

1952

