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Introduction

On the Corporate Media

*Statement of Subcomandante Marcos to the Freeing the Media Teach-In
(feb 1997)*

The giant communication media: the great monsters of the television industry, the communication satellites, magazines, and newspapers seem determined to present a virtual world, created in the image of what the globalization process requires.

In this sense, the world of contemporary news is a world that exists for the VIP's-- the very important people. Their everyday lives are what is important: if they get married, if they divorce, if they eat, what clothes they wear and what clothes they take off-- these major movie stars and big politicians. But common people only appear for a moment-- when they kill someone, or when they die. For the communication giants and the neoliberal powers, the others, the excluded, only exist when they are dead, or when they are in jail or court. This can't go on. Sooner or later this virtual world clashes with the real world. And that is actually happening: this clash produces results of rebellion and war throughout the entire world, or what is left of the world to even have war.

We have a choice: we can have a cynical attitude in the face of the media, to say that nothing can be done about the dollar power that creates itself in images, words, digital communication, and computer systems that invades not just with an invasion of power, but with a way of seeing that world, of how they think the world should look. We could say, well, "that's the way it is" and do nothing. Or we can simply assume incredulity: we can say that any communication by the media monopolies is a total lie. We can ignore it and go about our lives.

But there is a third option that is neither conformity, nor skepticism, nor distrust: that is to construct a different way-- to show the world what is really happening-- to have a critical world view and to become interested in the truth of what happens to the people who inhabit every corner of this world.

The work of independent media is to tell the history of social struggle in the world, and here in North America-- the US, Canada and Mexico, independent media has, on occasion, been able to open spaces even within the mass media monopolies: to force them to acknowledge news of other social movements.

The problem is not only to know what is occurring in the world, but to understand it and to derive lessons from it-- just as if we were studying history-- a history not of the past, but a history of what is happening at any given moment in whatever part of the world. This is the way to learn who we are, what it is we want, who we can be and what we can do or not do. By not having to answer to the monster media monopolies, the independent media has a life work, a political project and purpose: to let the truth be known. This is more and more important in the globalization process. This truth becomes a knot of resistance against the lie.



History of the Indymedia Center

The Independent Media Center (www.indymedia.org), was established by various independent and alternative media organizations and activists in 1999 for the purpose of providing grass roots coverage of the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle. The center acted as a clearing house of information for journalists, and provided up-to-the-minute reports, photos, audio and video footage through its web site. Using the collected footage, the Seattle Independent Media Center (seattle.indymedia.org) produced a series of five documentaries, uplinked every day to satellite and distributed throughout the United States to public access stations.

The center also produced its own newspaper, distributed throughout Seattle and to other cities via the internet, as well as hundreds of audio segments, transmitted through the web and Studio X, a 24-hour micro and internet radio station based in Seattle. The site, which uses a democratic open-publishing system, logged more than 2 million hits, and was featured on America Online, Yahoo, CNN, BBC Online, and numerous other sites. Through a decentralized and autonomous network, hundreds of media activists setup independent media centers in London, Canada, Mexico City, Prague, Belgium, France, and Italy over the next year. IMCs have since been established on every continent, with more to come.



Mission Statement

With autonomous chapters in over 80 cities throughout the world, what started as one web site in November of 1999 has quickly grown into an international network of volunteer media activists. The New York City Independent Media Center serves as the local organizing unit of the global Indymedia network. We are a not for profit community-based organization committed to using media production and distribution as a tool for promoting social and economic justice. It is our goal to give voice and resources to those people under-represented in the mainstream media. With an emphasis on local issues, we will seek connections to global systems. We intend to illuminate and analyze issues that are created by the increasing corporate domination of society and the subsequent erosion of democracy. We seek to generate alternatives to the bias inherent in profit-based media and to contribute to the development of an equitable and sustainable society.

Goals

- * To encourage a world where globalization is not about homogeneity and exploitation, but rather, about diversity and cooperation.
- * To cover local events that are ignored or poorly covered by corporate media.
- * To provide edited audio, video, and print stories of the above on the internet for use by independent, non profit media outlets and the general public.
- * To facilitate the networking and coordination of community groups by providing the means for communication and the dissemination of information.
- * To provide links to alternative media, activist, and research groups.
- * To offer community workshops for training in internet and media skills.

Get Involved

This is your independent media center. As an all volunteer organization, we need you to get involved! Introduce yourself at our volunteer sign up page (www.volunteer.indymedia.org) and check our contact page (www.nyc.indymedia.org/static.php3?page=contact) for info on meetings and e-mail lists.



Principles of Unity

1. The Independent Media Center Network (IMCN) is based upon principles of equality, decentralization and local autonomy. The IMCN is not derived from a centralized bureaucratic process, but from the self-organization of autonomous collectives that recognize the importance in developing a union of networks.
2. All IMC's consider open exchange of and open access to information a prerequisite to the building of a more free and just society.
3. All IMC's respect the right of activists who choose not to be photographed or filmed.
4. All IMC's, based upon the trust of their contributors and readers, shall utilize open web based publishing, allowing individuals, groups and organizations to express their views, anonymously if desired. Open Publishing document (still in proposal phase, at this address: <http://lists.indymedia.org/mailman/public/imc-communication/2001April001707.html>)
5. The IMC Network and all local IMC collectives shall be not-for-profit.
6. All IMC's recognize the importance of process to social change and are committed to the development of non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian relationships, from interpersonal relationships to group dynamics. Therefore, shall organize themselves collectively and be committed to the principle of consensus decision making and the development of a direct, participatory democratic process that is transparent to its membership.
7. All IMC's recognize that a prerequisite for participation in the decision making process of each local group is the contribution of an individual's labor to the group.
8. All IMC's are committed to caring for one another and our respective communities both collectively and as individuals and will promote the sharing of resources including knowledge, skills and equipment.
9. All IMC's shall be committed to the use of free source code, whenever possible, in order to develop the digital infrastructure, and to increase the independence of the network by not relying on proprietary software.
10. All IMC's shall be committed to the principle of human equality, and shall not discriminate, including discrimination based upon race, gender, age, class or sexual orientation. Recognizing the vast cultural traditions within the network, we are committed to building diversity within our localities.

* *The Indymedia Principles of Unity were drafted after a year of online communication within the Indymedia collectives worldwide and presented to a gathering of IMC's from 18 collectives at the Project Censored conference in San Francisco, April 2001.*

The Principles represent the core set of values shared throughout the network. While they've not yet been through a formal network-wide consensus process, they've been available for comment through a global working group (imc-unity@invitro.cat.org.au) and agreed to by all imcs who've joined the network since April 2001. They are a work in progress, shifting and changing as the network expands and grows.

Suggestions, discussion or questions should be directed to the email list or the Principles of Unity working group at imc-unity@invitro.cat.org.au. The group is also open to anyone within the Indymedia network interested in working with the Principles of Unity.



Mutual Aid Agreement

The New York City Independent Media Center (NYC IMC) is an experiment in volunteer run participatory media. We have no underwriters, no advertisers, and no corporate sponsors. We have no paid staff. This Mutual Aid Agreement is not a membership form. This agreement recognizes that in order for the NYC IMC to be sustainable, function, and grow, work beyond media making is essential. There are a variety of ways to help support our mission and your level of involvement is entirely up to you. Please read and sign the mutual aid agreement below.

I have read and agree in spirit to the Indymedia network principles of unity and the NYC IMC Mission Statement.

I have read and agree to the NYC IMC In House Codes of Conduct

Before participating in the formal decision making process of the IMC I will:

- Attend an orientation meeting. Orientation meetings take place at 4 pm on the 1st Sunday of every month one hour before general meetings.
- Read information on consensus process and NYC IMC structure documents.
- Respect the consensus process.

I agree to rotate responsibilities with my working group peers. This includes facilitation, note taking, and attendance at general meetings

I will donate a minimum of \$10 (\$5 to general, \$5 to your primary working group) a month in three month increments to cover basic office expenses. (i.e. phone, toner, etc.) No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

I will not abuse the resources of the NYC IMC for personal use.

I will join a particular working group, or if I have a project that is outside of an established working group, I will present my idea to the general meeting before committing NYC IMC resources to it. I understand that NYC IMC working group projects take priority.

Besides media making, print, video, and radio working group members are asked to contribute time and labor to the infrastructure and sustainability of the Indymedia project, that is, volunteer time that extends beyond media making. There are a variety of ways to help support our mission here and your level of involvement is entirely up to you. We just ask that there be some level of involvement, which can range from checking voice mail to organizing workshops, and everything in between.



Below are examples of ways to help.

Infrastructure

- Inter-working group organization and liasioning
- Facilitating general meetings
- Checking voice mail and responding to calls
- List administration
- Get involved with global network working groups
- Organize the space

Distribution

Newspaper

- Maintaining and expanding subscriptions
- Distributing papers at rallies, drop-off locations, organizations
- Do mailings to other IMCs
- Researching new drop-off sites

Video

- Responding to requests for videos
- Organizing screenings
- Distributing to potential broadcasters
- Doing publicity for new videos
- Maintaining video buyers database

Radio

- Finding potential broadcasters
- Maintaining web archive

Finance

- Book-keeping
- Organize fund raisers
- Grant research
- Grant writing

Outreach

- Creating publicity documents
- Setting up screenings and panel discussions
- Organizing workshops
- Doing Indymedia presentations for groups all over the city
- Responding to volunteers that contact us via email or by phone
- Facilitating an orientation every once in a while
- Tabling at conferences
- Networking sympathetic organizations in the city



In House Codes of Conduct

The NYC-IMC strives to create an open and supportive environment where journalists, activists, and community members can gather to collaborate, share ideas, resources, and strength. We model the anti-racist anti-imperialist anti-sexist and pro-queer world we try to build, free of the pursuit of profit and personal ego.

We, participants in the New York City Independent Media Center, agree

- to respect the viewpoints and privacy of others in the IMC
- to contribute constructively to the group and to use the spirit of consensus to reach decisions
- not to use or tolerate harassment or violence or threat there of in conjunction with our media work
- not to represent our personal viewpoints as viewpoints of the IMC
- not to let money or political coercion influence content.
- to the terms of the mutual aid agreement

In extreme cases, the participants in the NYC IMC may collectively decide it is necessary to expel an individual from the IMC. A permanent banning of an individual is a serious issue and will only occur in extreme conditions and when other means of conflict resolution have been exhausted. The below list is not absolute and does not attempt to cover every possible circumstance. It is meant to be a framework for action and a guidepost; ultimately the decision to expel an individual must rest with the members of the collective and should be arrived at by the NYC IMC consensus process in a general meeting.

Grounds for Expulsion

- Violent behavior or threat of violence.
- Blatant or consistent racist, sexist, or homophobic acts
- Purposefully damaging NYC IMC property.
- Stealing from the premises of the NYC IMC

People banned from the IMC are also banned from IMC fund raisers, screenings and other IMC events.

Upon encountering violent or inappropriate behavior, members are expected to respond in a way that de-escalates tensions and results in a peaceful resolution.

Volunteers who expel someone in an emergency situation should make a full report to the general meeting, send a note to the imc-nyc-process@indymedia.org list, and post a note on the bulletin board at the entrance to the IMC. If someone is banned from the IMC, the banned person should be asked to leave by one and all upon entrance to the IMC or IMC event. People who disagree with this should voice their point of view at the general meeting.



Process & Structure

Introduction

The NYC IMC seeks to be an open, inclusive, accountable democratic organization. Realizing that there is no perfect structure or process that will be appropriate for every situation, yet also recognizing that a sustainable organization needs a solid foundation upon which to grow, this document sets out a structure and process by which the NYC IMC shall operate. It has been designed keeping in mind that the success of an organization depends in part on its process and structure, but even more so on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the participants bring to it. We all share a commitment to honesty, respect, flexibility and humor. While this structure is a concrete guideline, the process is a living one whose effectiveness depends upon open communication and continuous feedback.

The contents of this document were consensed on by the NYC IMC (Jan. 2001) and can be changed only through the process laid out herein.

Communication, Structure and Decision Making

The NYC IMC community has two primary public forums: meetings and list serves. There is a general meeting every Sunday at 5pm at the NYC IMC Office (34 East 29th street, between park & Madison, 2nd floor). The general listserv is imc-nyc@indymedia.org. Our structure recognizes that each of these forums have strengths and weaknesses in meeting the ideals of openness and inclusiveness. Ultimate full decision-making power regarding decisions that affect the entire organization rests in the general meetings with participation solicited from the appropriate list. To the fullest extent possible, the business of a meeting and any proposals are posted on the list with enough time so that the concerns and opinions of the list members unable to attend the meeting can be brought there on their behalf. We seek to be as open and inclusive as possible and each of these forums offers some advantage and disadvantage in this regard. *When it comes to decision making, we do this in person through consensus*, but are determined to make sure that people participating through the list are informed about proposals that are on the table and that their ideas, concerns, and positions are considered. As of 2002 general meeting organization and debates takes place on the process list imc-nyc-proces@lists.indymedia.org and general meeting notes are posted to the general list and all working group lists.

In addition to the general group, we also have working groups. Working groups are also empowered to make decisions. Any proposed decisions that effect the organization significantly are first posted on the general list. There are of two kinds of working group. The media working groups are primarily focused on working within their medium. They work both alone on projects, and in conjunction with other working groups. Participation is open to all who support the mission of that working group and are interested in working, or supporting work with that medium. The other working groups are involved in organizational administration and operations. These include finance, outreach, and distribution. These groups are organized around the spokes model, meaning they seek to include someone from each working group who can act as communication liaisons between each of these groups and their respective media working group.



General Meeting

Decision Making

Our decision making process attempts to balance this spirit of consensus with the practical constraints of time and the possible presence of individuals not truly working for the mission of the NYC IMC. Consensus decision-making is more of an art than a science. Each situation is unique. Effective decision making ultimately depends on each person's understanding and commitment to the spirit of consensus, not on a procedural formula. The process laid out here provides a guideline for treating each decision as an opportunity to reach consensus and take collective action with the full support of the group, yet it also provides the structure to take action when it's not possible to reach consensus.

The ideal is that through discussion, a proposal evolves that no member of the group is opposed to adopting. Pure consensus puts the power to block or veto any decision in the hands of any individual that has been involved in the work and will be affected by the outcome. We modify this process to consensus-minus-one and limit the power of blocking to any two individuals. In some cases there may be decisions that group members feel are more important to take action on than adhere to this strict principle of consensus-minus-one. In this case, if no compromise or alternative proposal can reach consensus, the proposal can be adopted in a two-step process. A proposal can be adopted:

1. IF 2/3 of the group agree that consensus minus one is not the appropriate decision making process in this situation and that passing the proposal through a 2/3 majority vote would better serve the mission of the NYC IMC than dropping the proposal altogether.
2. AND 2/3 of the group support adopting the proposal

The facilitator will generally test for consensus after it seems that a proposal that has evolved through discussion and modification has the widespread support of the group. They will do this by asking if anyone wants to stand aside. To stand aside means that a person doesn't support a proposal, but they don't feel strongly enough against to feel that it shouldn't be passed. Before consensus is reached, each person that is standing aside is asked to share their reasons for not supporting the proposal and the group must consider these concerns and ask themselves if there is a way to modify the proposal further so that these concerns are addressed.

After the group has heard from each person that has chosen to stand aside, the facilitator will ask if anyone blocks the proposal. A person should choose to block only when they feel that there is an unresolved concern so serious that it conflicts with the principles of the organization and that it would be better for no action to be taken than for the proposal to be adopted. If there are no blocks, then the facilitator will get the groups affirmation of the proposal and it is passed. If there are blocks at this point, after there has already been many opportunities to address concerns by modifying the proposal, the group must consider if the concerns of the blocker are based on a difference of principle that is not going to be resolved through further discussion.

People who find themselves blocking proposals often that the broader group tends to support should ask themselves if perhaps this group is not for them.



If there is only one block then a proposal can be adopted by consensus minus one. If there are two or more blocks that have followed due process then the proposal cannot be adopted by consensus. In this case, some individuals might want to follow through on the project themselves without the support of the entire organization, or the group might want to drop the proposal all together. The only other option is to move to a 2/3 majority vote as described above. It is important to note that each of the two steps described above must take place to make this move.

Roles

Outlined here is a model for how general meetings (GM's) are run. GM's are held once a week on pre-scheduled dates that can only be changed within a GM. There are three roles that people fill for general meetings:

1. The Time Keeper watches the time and reminds the facilitator, when a topic is going on beyond the set time.
2. The Note Keeper takes minutes that summarize the discussions of the meeting. This person is also responsible for typing the minutes and posting them on the general list in a timely fashion.
3. Two Co-Facilitators take responsibility for certain parts of GM's, at least one of whom is chosen at the previous meeting. In selecting volunteers for the role of facilitator, diversity and rotation are encouraged. Though one facilitator should be experienced, the other is encouraged to be someone new to facilitating. Leadership and responsibility for the process are shared by all participants, but the following duties are specifically assigned to the facilitators. They must:

- Post a couple reminders of when the meeting is on the general list.
- Provide a copy of minutes from last meeting to read old business from.
- Keep the boards; writing the Agenda, Stack, Action List, and Calendar.
- Flexibly keep conversation on track and move through agenda using most appropriate discussion format (sometimes this means breaking out into small groups)
- Give short introduction to how the meeting works at the opening that includes:
 - a) Explaining the etiquette used at meeting: honesty, patience and respect, especially when in being considerate of occupying others' time.
 - b) Encouraging everyone to participate by raising their hand and having their name written on the stack.
 - c) Encouraging people to explain any jargon they might use, and encouraging anyone who doesn't understand some jargon to interrupt and ask the meaning.
 - d) Introducing how a straw poll works by posing a question that each member of the group must respond to by putting their thumb up, down, or sideways.
 - e) Explain the spirit of consensus decision making: that we strive to listen to all concerns and ideas and adopt decisions that best supports the work of the collective.



Meeting Agenda

- Facilitators, time keeper, and note taker are identified
- Facilitators give a short intro to the process if new people are present
- Everyone introduces themselves
- Volunteers present a short inspirational piece
- Working Group Report backs
- Announcements
- Agenda (decide at the start the amount of time and order for each agenda item. Important items should be presented first, since the size of the meeting usually diminishes over time)
- Follow up from last week
- New agenda items
- Feedback (facilitator and meeting evaluation)
- Q+A for new people while everyone else disperses

Note Taker Duties

The primary role of the note taker is to keep account of three things:

- What has been consensed on.
- What is proposed
- Action points (who has volunteered to do what)

All other notes to be taken are decided on by the note taker or can be requested, but the three items listed above should be displayed prominently for easy archiving and referencing.



Working Group Decision Making

Each working group also uses both live meetings and online communication to organize. They follow the same guidelines about participation as the general group for making decisions. This extends also to informing the general community about the consideration of any major decisions that will impact the community. So, when a working group is facing a major decision, they will let the general community know about it. Anyone who has ideas or feelings about that decision can participate in the process of making it, either by attending the meeting where it is made, or joining an online discussion about it. Final decisions are made by those who participate in the work of any particular project.

When a decision is made, it is announced with the plan for its implementation. The plan creates accountability of those that have taken on responsibility. The decision can only be changed by going through the entire process again.

