

Membership and finance

Passed at the June 2019 national meeting

The January 2016 National Meeting decided:

“A member agrees with the politics of revolution from below and has a commitment to liberation politics, anti-imperialism and anti-fascism. Members should play an active role in the organisation and pay subs where possible.”

rs21 members should pay subs where possible. This is important to enable the functioning and development of our organisation.

What are our subs for?

rs21 aims to establish organisation to facilitate debate, clarify our ideas, support our collective work in workplace struggle and social movements, and argue for revolutionary socialism and Marxism. The local and national work we undertake to achieve these aims costs money.

Typical national examples include:

- Our organiser - establishing organisation, facilitating the rest of our work, working on the website to facilitate debate and argue for our politics
- Venues - to organise, facilitate debate, clarify and argue for our ideas
- Creches - to maximise participation in our work
- Printing rs21 leaflets and stickers - to argue for our ideas and for action
- Paying up front, and sometimes subsidising, printing pamphlets - to facilitate debates and argue for our ideas
- Graphic design work - to make our publications attractive and effective
- Online services e.g. website hosting - to get our ideas across
- Travel costs - to organise, facilitate debate and argue for our ideas

Local examples include:

- Venues - to organise, facilitate debate, clarify and argue for our ideas
- Printing rs21 leaflets - to argue for our ideas, advertise meetings and action
- Promoting events online - to argue for our ideas, advertise meetings and action
- Travel costs - to bring speakers to facilitate debate, clarify and argue for our ideas
- Helping members with costs for attending rs21's national meetings
- Buying a megaphone, banner etc. - to facilitate our activism and raise our organisational profile

Most of our costs are national. Local costs will vary considerably depending on branch activity. Some groups may have access to free meeting venues, while others may have to pay a lot.

Membership, money and politics

Change comes from working class self-activity, and that should be reflected in how we organise. rs21 isn't aiming to be a third-party providing a service to its members and supporters. We are a collective organisation *of* those members. We want members to feel ownership, responsibility and control over our organisation. The same applies to non-members who participate in our meetings and events - if they contribute practically and/or financially they feel more invested in making it a success and following through on any outcomes.

The decision that “members should play an active role in the organisation and pay subs where possible” is important to allow clarity about who is a member. This is necessary both to maximise participation and to empower members. rs21 recruits: in April, seven people signed up through the online form alone. If it’s not clear who is a member, how do we know who we are trying to involve? It is disempowering for members if those who contribute no time, energy or money even when they could be treated as members and get to vote on what others in the organisation should do and what political positions we take. At the same time, rs21 aims to be inclusive e.g. for people with precarious financial situations, irregular working hours, health problems and caring responsibilities.

Raising money can be used as a form of “structure test”, to measure how well our structures work and how committed people are to our organisation. Such a test isn’t perfect, because other factors play a part, such as people’s personal finances. But a local group that signs up all its members to pay subs and gets donations from non-members at its events is obviously healthier *in some respects* than one that doesn’t, though if that was its primary focus then there would clearly be other problems. Financial contributions from members and non-members are a sign of support, even if lack of contributions should not be interpreted as a lack of support.

Making things (publications, events) free can increase uptake. Not only are they more welcoming for people short of money, but they may draw in people who don’t have the commitment to pay. The latter point is double edged. It may give us access to people who may become committed later. Or not asking for any financial commitment could make it harder for us to identify our real audience, or set a pattern of people not feeling ownership or thinking rs21 doesn’t take itself seriously as an organisation.

In general, leaflets, stickers and routine local meetings should be free but we should ask for donations. More substantial events and publications should have a reasonable charge but we should offer support or exceptions where appropriate.

rs21 members are members of or active in a myriad of other organisations from unions to campaigns and even political parties. Many, but not all, expect members to pay subs, just as most religious or sport organisations do. This expectation of paying for things has, however, been undermined by a lack of tradition in autonomist groups, internet culture etc. People often get news, music, videos, games, books, apps and online services “free”. In many cases they aren’t really free - they are funded by the use or sale of your personal data or advertising. We don’t do this. In other cases people are just avoiding paying big corporations, and in others this freebie culture is causing real problems. We will sometimes find ourselves having to explain to people why we ask people to pay or contribute - this political argument is not necessarily intuitive.

In general, the other campaigns and organisations we are involved in will have wider appeal and support than rs21, a tiny revolutionary group. That means that it makes more sense to directly help those campaigns or organisation fundraise, instead of donating from rs21’s budget and hence members’ subs. We want to avoid members feeling constantly “taxed” by the organisation which could discourage participation. Rather than rs21 substituting for the movement by extracting money from members and subsidising wider campaigns, we need to raise money for those campaigns from those who support them, not just rs21 members. This has much more potential for those campaigns, and fundraising as an activity can help to push a political message to a wider audience and increase commitment to a project.

Current status

Many comrades who consider themselves members don't make regular financial contributions. National membership records have been separate from national subs information and local membership records. Despite the efforts of organisers and other comrades, there has not been enough shared understanding of who is or isn't a member by the local groups and the national organisation. This hinders systematic communication with and involvement of every member. Our treasurer is now reconciling national membership with national subs information, which is a start.

Some branches collect cash to pay for local expenses. Some others get members to pay regular local subs, either to a dedicated account or to an account belonging to a trusted member. Some don't have any system for funding their activities. This risks discouraging participation because members may be left out of pocket if they spend money on behalf of the local group, or discouraging activity if members don't believe it is affordable.

Proposals:

1. A member is someone who:
 - a. Sees themselves as a member;
 - b. Has submitted a membership form. It is noted that this point cannot be applied immediately as many current members have not done so;
 - c. Agrees with the politics of revolution from below, liberation politics, anti-imperialism and anti-fascism;
 - d. When possible, plays an active role in the organisation and its work and pay subs. It is recognised that individual circumstances vary and change, and this is not intended to exclude people from membership who contribute as and when they can;
 - e. Has not been barred from membership by the Steering Group or a National Meeting.
2. A member has the right to fully participate in the democratic decisions of the organisation, including voting in national meetings and standing for election.
3. Membership and subs information should be handled with appropriate considerations of privacy.
4. Local groups should agree a member who will maintain their local membership list, receive national membership and subs information, and work with the organiser to resolve any discrepancies.
5. All local groups should set up a bank account (taking into account convenience, boycotts etc.) for their own use. The national treasurer can advise how to do this. Nearby groups may choose to share one or agree how to handle shared costs (e.g. cross-London meetings).
6. All members should pay national subs at a level they find sustainable unless there are circumstances that make this too difficult.
7. All members in local groups should also pay local subs unless there are circumstances that make this too difficult.
8. Local groups may apply for additional funds in exceptional circumstances, and this will be decided by the Steering Group on a case by case basis.
9. If local groups build up more funds than they need, they may choose to donate to the national organisation.

10. When a local group bank account is set up, the central organisation may provide an initial injection of funds if this is necessary to get the ball rolling
11. Subs are best paid by monthly Standing Order.
12. In general, the ratio of national to local subs should be about 2:1. Where local groups need to vary this, it should be discussed with the national treasurer.
13. The national treasurer provides a financial report to each National Meeting, and will provide other reports to the Steering Group as appropriate. In addition, the treasurer will provide full bank statements to the Organiser. The Steering Group is responsible for setting appropriate policies and rules for national finances.
14. Local groups are responsible for determining appropriate policies and rules for local finances (e.g. signatories, any reports) but are encouraged to ensure administrative workload is proportionate.
15. Unless decided otherwise, attendees should be asked to contribute financially to rs21 events either through a ticket price or a collection.
16. A donation button facility should be added to our website.
17. In order to increase participation, improve communication and improve rs21 finances, local groups, with the support of the Organiser, should contact all those who may consider themselves members and encourage them to submit a fresh membership form and set up appropriate local and/or national subs.