

To Dallas DC on District structure and election of local leadership

To the Dallas District Committee, Jan. 10, 2025

Comrades—

I have read the “Resolution on Democratization of District Leadership (Draft),” and been in communication with the Dallas District Organizer over the past few week. I have also consulted with the Organizational Secretary regarding that resolution and what course of action to take.

I would like to offer a self-criticism in my role as contact for Dallas for the Standing Committee. I have not been as attentive to all aspects of the District’s political life as I could have been, communicating mainly about your District’s engagement with national projects, rate of recruitment, mass work, and so forth. In general, my calls with the DO haven’t been as frequent as they should have been. If I had been more diligent in understanding the life of the District from all sides, including its methods of internal organization, I think some current difficulties could have been avoided.

I think the positive aspect of the resolution is that comrades are putting thought and effort into how to have effective, democratic leadership of the Dallas District. The negative aspect of the resolution is that it is not in line with the practice of any other Districts of our organization, would add a currently unnecessary layer of bureaucracy, and was pursued too hastily without enough consultation with the Center.

Our shared goals here should be to correct past errors, improve District functioning, and strengthen democratic centralism. The District will work to establish a process for evaluating and electing its District Organizer. We will proceed one step at a time and assess along the way.

Clarification on election of local leadership

The Dallas DO asked me over the phone last week about the national practice regarding election of District Organizers. I responded that my understanding was that most Districts elect their DO annually, which was based on my own experience in Chicago and the Twin Cities. The Dallas DO has told the District Committee that he understood DO to be a position appointed by the Center. Both of these things are true. Early on in the development of Districts, the DO is appointed, usually in a *de facto* way as there is often only one comrade who is willing and able to take up the work of building up the District from scratch. If the Center feels like a comrade is not performing the responsibilities of DO effectively, it can choose someone else to take the role. Over time, as Districts develop and grow, there is a transition to regular election of leadership. In practice, these elections are often uncontested. The pool of people capable of taking up the responsibilities of DO is small, and the number of those *willing* to do it are smaller.

Here is the relevant part of our *Rules*, section III, point 4:

4. The Central Committee has the exclusive right to establish or dissolve lower committees or to delegate that right. In particular, the Central Committee has the responsibility to establish committees to exercise the leading functions and powers in a given locale. To the extent possible, established local committees will have elected leadership.

The Center has the right to establish or dissolve lower committees, and in general, its better to have elections for local leadership. The Center does not wish to micro-manage Districts functioning, and in general the members of a District are in the best position to decide who among them is most capable of leading. But if the Center feels that a sitting DO is failing in their responsibilities, or if the person chosen through election is unsuitable for any reason, it has the prerogative to appoint someone else.

The DO has told me that some DC members feel like the DO's recollection that his was an appointed position—while the Center said other places elect the DO—has shown the DO to be untrustworthy with regard to our rules or directives from the Center. Members of the District may criticize the DO for not establishing structures for electing local leadership sooner, but I do not believe he has willfully disregarded our rules and norms. The fact is that most newer, growing districts have not elected their District Organizers—in the course of their development, the Center worked with the person who was most capable and willing to take on the large and difficult job of developing the District, and many places haven't reached the point of development where there is more than one person both capable and willing to lead. The fact is also that most long-established, large Districts do have a regular process for electing their District Organizers.

Dallas is not longer a small or new District, and the creation of this resolution and the number of District Committee members who voted for it shows clearly that it is time for the District to develop a process for evaluating and electing the leadership of the District.

To be very clear, this process will not be taking the form of implementing the “Resolution on Democratization of District Leadership (Draft).” That resolution should not be distributed, discussed, or voted on by the District as a whole.

The relationship between District leaders and mass work

All cadre should be involved in mass work, building and deepening our ties with the masses. Unit leaders and members of the District Committee should have the firmest grasp on our mass work. We test our understanding through practice. At the present size of our organization, through the experience of many other districts, we have found that it makes the most sense for the DO, unit leaders, and others they wish to co-opt to form the District Committee. We would need a much larger and deeper base among the masses to justify an intermediate layer of cadre whose primary work is studying the mass work that other comrades are carrying out. I am aware that the author of the resolution and many of the District Committee members who supported it are Unit leaders, and I am also aware that if the resolution were implemented, it would be possible for Unit leaders to also be on the District Committee. But the resolution also very clearly opens the possibility for members of the

District Committee to be people other than Unit leaders, and some Units to have their Unit leader not present on the DC. The Organizational Secretary and I do not believe that is a good idea at the present time.

This is not just a personnel issue, i.e., not having enough skilled and experienced cadre to spare them for this middle leadership layer. It is more fundamentally one of connection to the masses and mass work, related to the Marxist theory of knowledge and the mass line—leading cadre who are intimately involved in mass work, who grasp firmly its details and development, will more often be correct in their summation and analysis of that mass work. We do not think a few years of practice in our mass work is enough of a body of experience for a cadre to transition to a position where their main work for the organization would be analyzing the mass work that others are doing.

Balance of the responsibilities of organizational roles and mass work

I understand that some of the impetus for this resolution is that comrades feel like the DC isn't leading effectively. The solution that has been effective for other Districts, when they find that leading cadre aren't able to handle the internal and red work side of things, is that those leading comrades adjust the balance of mass work they are doing. For example, if the DO never seems to have time to distribute internal bulletins in a timely way, or check in with unit heads, or organize district-wide internal study, etc. etc., then the DO should consider taking up fewer responsibilities in the mass work, without eliminating their involvement or inventing a new organizational position. If Unit chairs feel they don't have time to lead the process of regular summation in their Unit, they should work with others in the Unit to take more of the task load in the mass work, and beyond the Unit, should constantly be looking for ways to involve the mass members and promote their leadership of the mass organization.

Reporting, summation and a District work plan

Regular summation and reporting is good. Requiring frequent written reports from all units raises a security concern in which possibly too many cadre would have paper or electronic copies of all the details of all the mass work and internal functioning of the District. My suggestion would be that the district can start out by producing such written summations annually, after a period of discussion among the unit. Verbal summation should take place regularly in Unit, District Committee, and District meetings.

Another practice larger and more established Districts engage in is written work plans, usually covering a period of several years, which are produced through a process of discussion and consultation within units, in the DC, and at the District level. The Center is also available to advise on the development of this kind of plan. I know that the Political Secretary reviews and assists in the development of 3-year work plans for LA, Minneapolis, and Chicago.

Criticism and self-criticism

The development of this resolution and the swiftness of the moves to implement it were surprising to me. Maybe this was due to my own neglect in asking particular questions of the DO about the internal dynamics of the District regarding any criticisms of his leadership. The appearance of it from my point of view, however, is that there must have been some serious issues or criticisms in how the District was being led, culminating in a desire among the DC for a change in District leadership. “We want a new DO” shouldn’t be the first criticism the Center hears regarding the DO. If there are political errors or criticisms of the DO, they should be raised and discussed as they happen among the District Committee. The DO should communicate those issues to me. The DO should respond to and rectify any correct criticisms. If the DO is unwilling or unable to correct major political issues or leadership questions, a change in leadership should be discussed.

This goes both ways. In the course of discussing this issue with the DO, he has raised criticisms of various other District comrades to me. If he hasn’t raised these criticisms with the comrades involved, that is a mistake. If comrades holding particular responsibilities—such as leading studies, collecting dues, or organizing general members—are not carrying out their duties, they should be criticized, and if they fail to rectify their errors, the District Committee should find someone else willing to carry out those responsibilities. It is liberalism to “let things slide for the sake of peace.”

There should be a regular and on-going culture of criticism and self-criticism. Every Unit, District, and Central Committee meeting of this organization that I have participated in incorporates this into the agenda. This is to constantly improve our work in an open and forthright matter, and also helps issues not to fester unspoken and unresolved until there is an open and urgent conflict.

A final point relating to C/S-C and summation is that we often spend more discussing and analyzing our errors or mistakes than we do our successes, because we want to improve our work. It is one-sided to automatically let this lead to an assumption that our mistakes and problems are primary. If a District wasn’t recruiting people and was losing cadre, if it wasn’t building the level of political understanding and organization among the masses, if it found itself unable to strike any kind of blows against the enemy—this would be a District in which the mistakes are principal. I’m sure there are legitimate criticisms to be made of the current DO, and I understand he has raised self-criticisms around his approach to this recent discussion. Under his leadership, Dallas has grown to be one of our larger Districts, one which has made significant contributions to the mass movements in the area; I think these things are principal over his errors.

Deciding on a process for electing the DO, other District positions

One of the rationales for the “Resolution,” in the second paragraph, is that the District Committee is “not elected by the membership of the District.” Unit leaders should be elected by their units. If that is not the practice in Dallas, it should also be established.

Regarding establishing a process for electing District leadership, I would suggest that the District Committee devote part of its meetings to discussing the question over the next month or so. This

should not just be an abstract discussion focused only on structures and processes. Any process decided upon should have the purpose of enhancing the functioning of the District in a practical way, and should avoid unnecessarily disrupting the practical activity of the District. If there are political criticisms of the current leadership, they should be raised and discussed. The political qualifications and skills of other potential District Organizers should be discussed openly. The District Committee should conduct these discussions in a spirit of collectivity, keeping in mind our shared goal of building a new communist party that can lead the working class and oppressed peoples of this country in making revolution.

This will also give me time to speak further with the Organizational Secretary and the DOs of large Districts on the exact processes by which they elect District leadership, which I can share with you all.

I know that this is a busy time for the District, with a large meeting coming up and a major mobilization on January 20, but I would ask that part of the next District Committee be used to discuss the points I raise in this letter, and I would like the content of the discussion relayed to me by the DO.

Solidarity,
Andy
for the Standing Committee

Addendum: District Organizer Tasks and Responsibilities

This is an internal document created by an established District as general guidelines for the role of DO. It is not an “official” guidance document in that it has not been reviewed and voted on by a leading committee or selected to be incorporated into our organizational manual, but I think it may be helpful.

1. The DO is the overall political leader of the District, and must have a working knowledge of the different areas of work.
2. The DO prepares materials for the discussion of political questions facing the District, organizational policies and organizational resolutions. S/he must be in contact with people in the district to see what issues are coming up.
3. In an emergency, or when an issue arises that must be dealt with immediately, the DO mobilizes the district to take action and takes responsibility for decisions which need to be made around such issues.
4. The DO makes sure that district decisions are being carried out by members of the district.
5. The DO leads the District Committee and sees that it is carrying out its work.
6. The DO develops new leadership from the district, working with the District Committee to ensure that new leadership skills are being learned, and to give feedback on people's work.
7. The DO keeps in contact and ensures two-way communication with the Center.
8. The DO coordinates red work and building an organizational life around the District.
9. The DO is a good example of how an organization member works among the masses.

To be a little bit more particular about this, the DO:

- a) Develops the agenda for and chairs the meetings of the District Committee, makes sure the District Committee is meeting.*
- b) Makes sure district-wide projects are going forward (examples: May day, Congress preparation)*
- c) Handles communications with the Center*
- d) Makes sure finances (including dues) are on track and that Fight Back! Is being distributed*
- e) takes lead in solving problems (personal problems, unit functioning, etc.)*