

Some points on democratic centralism

Democratic centralism is the organizational theory and mode of practice for communist organization. It is used by all communist parties. It is the way all real communist organizations do their work.

Democratic centralism is based on some well-known concepts; the individual is subordinate to organization, the minority is subordinate to majority, lower bodies to higher bodies, the entire organization is subordinate to the Central Committee which delegates its powers to its leading bodies when it is not in session, and the Congress is the highest decision making body of the organization. These points are drawn from our rules which everyone should be familiar with (and there is plenty more written there.)

Democratic centralism embodies the unity between democracy and centralism. Mao makes the point, "Without democracy there cannot be any correct centralism because people's ideas differ, and if their understanding of things lacks unity then centralism cannot be established. What is centralism? First of all, it is a centralization of correct ideas, on the basis of which unity of understanding, policy, planning, command and action are achieved. This is called centralized unification. If people still do not understand problems, if they have ideas but have not expressed them, or are angry but still have not vented their anger, how can centralized unification be established?"

We practice democratic centralism for two reasons. First, we want to be effective. Secondly, its organizational embodiment of the Marxist theory of knowledge. Comrades interested in more on these points can look at the study on the role of units which is on our website (*"On Marxist organization" under the Theory section: <https://frso.org/main-documents/on-marxist-organization/>*).

We are building a new communist party and to do that we need to strengthen democratic centralism. But we have some problems which this paper looks to address. The vast majority of our organization is new – they have joined our ranks in the last 3 years. So, most comrades do not have that much experience with the application of democratic centralism. As for veteran comrades – we have very few of them and they are concentrated in a handful of cities. And most of them have little or no experience in leading a large communist organization, so they also can benefit from this discussion.

Channels are important

We are not a network, and it is important that comrades go through the correct channels to carry out their work. Districts that want to do things with other Districts must coordinate that with the Center (which is the Central Committee or more typically, its smaller, day-to-day leadership body, the Standing Committee, SC). For example, a District cannot decide it would be a really good thing if we had a national conference on Palestine and then proceed to organize other districts to attend. If things like this were allowed to happen, we would cease to be a unified, national organization, with a single political center.

So, if a District would like to initiate something with another District, the correct way to do it is for the District Organizer (who is the principal leader of a district) to contract the comrade in the Center who is responsible for their city. The comrade(s) in the Center will look at the proposal, consult with needed leading comrades, and then act.

It is a mistake for a District leader in city x to say we are going to have an event and then proceed to ask members of other districts or make the request of other District Organizers without going through the Center. The same applies to those in national leadership. No one in the Center should just reach out to individuals without going through the District leadership and if applicable the comrade at the Center who is responsible for that district.

Failure to follow the correct channels for communication weakens democratic centralism and undermines our efforts to develop new leadership. If veteran comrades (of others) simply call on the folks they know and bypass the existing leadership, how do we expect new leaders to grow and develop? They won't.

Districts, units, and the center

Every district is made up of units that are based around different areas of work. The district is led by a District Committee and with the District Organizer functioning as the overall leader, chairing most meetings of the District Committee.

Developed District Committees where we have large organizations meet every week or so. The District Committee typically consists of the District Organizer, Unit Leaders, and anyone else they co-opt to be a part of the District leadership. In Districts with multiple Units, we typically have meetings once a month of the entire membership.

In the cases of cities that are new and undeveloped – the District organization mirrors that of a Unit in the larger city. All the members meet together to make decisions and the District Organizer plays a role similar to that of a Unit Leader.

The District Organizer is the comrade who is in direct communication with the Center. The Center decides who from the Center is responsible for communication with a given District

Let's take an example of what happens when we have a national initiative underway, such as International Women's Day. The Center issues a call for the whole organization to take it up. Guidance is prepared, signs with slogans, etc. The District Organizer leads the District in making plans. In some cases, a work team is established to plan and carry out the event under the overall leadership of the District. The comrade from the Center responsible for the District will call to see how the effort is going and to offer advice if needed.

When that call comes, the District Organizer does not say, "I do not know what our plans for IWD are, Max is in charge of the project. Why don't you call them?" Instead, the DO states what the plans are and talks them over for the comrade from the Center. If there are issues that need to be taken up with the comrades actually working on the project, the DO is the one who conveys that.

For events like International Women's Day, it is great when Districts make plans that take into account local conditions and add slogans to draw more people. It is not so good when Districts ignore the slogans and guidance from the Center, and still worse when Districts directly contradicts the established line.

What is the general line?

Our program and the documents we have adopted at Congresses are Marxism-Leninism applied to the conditions we face. This also constitutes the general line. The Central Committee is elected with the expectation that they are the best comrades possible to carry that line out.

The general line is a broad category of political positions, for example, that there are 5 socialist countries. It includes strategic concepts such as building a new communist party being our central task. It also includes negatives, things that are not written but that we have rejected at congresses after much debate, such as white skin privilege theory which postulates national oppression materially improves the lives of the whites.

During the Congress process we can debate the general line, or parts thereof. In non-Congress periods we do not. For example, we say China is a socialist country. A few comrades do not agree. We

can debate that during the Congress period. Otherwise, all comrades should promote and uphold the reality of socialism in China.

What happens if we disagree?

The simple answer is that we lay problems on the table and then we vote. We do what the majority decides to do. If the Unit Leader or the District Organizer or the Political Secretary of the Central Committee disagrees with the way the vote went, that is too bad for them. We put the decision into practice, then we sum it up and see who is correct. Comrades can communicate disagreements to higher bodies, but it is extremely unlikely that a District-level decision will be overturned by a higher body unless it involves a question of principle.

In cases where you are in opposition to a decision, the absolute best thing to do is take the lead in carrying it out and try to make it work. If it was a wrong decision, you will have real credibility in the summation process.

What would be an example of issues of principle? Districts that decide to recruit folks without them going through the basic study course would be an issue of principle. Likewise, local organizations promoting lines that are openly contrary to what we are saying nationally would need to be looked at. For example, we disagree with much of the international communist movement on the question of Israel – most communist parties do not say Israel has no right to exist – but we do. So, we do not promote views about returning to '67 borders or promoting any two-state solution.

What happens when comrades disagree with the decisions of a higher body? They can certainly make their views known to that body, but they must carry out the decisions made. We put the decisions into practice and then we can sum up the practice.

Advocates for the line, advocates for decisions made, and the need to be effective

When a leading body decides on something, members of that body need to promote that decision. Lower bodies do too. For example, a District Committee decides that May Day will involve a march to support striking miners. Some members, leaders of big units, disagree. One says that the miners are hostile to their union in the local Labor Council, so fuck them. Another member of the DC states they know many of the miners and that they are very backwards. So, these two lost the vote in the District Committee. What do they do now? They set aside their own views and mobilize their units and their respective mass bases to carry out the decision. Members of the leading body do not say things like "now we have to carry out a stupid line." They should say, "here is what we are doing, it is a good plan, how can we make this work."

The same thing applies on a national level. Leadership is elected in our organization. We make decisions and put them into practice. We are not mechanical about this. But we are firm on the issues of principle.

On leadership

Without exception, every organization body (Commission, Work Team, Unit, etc.) has a definite relationship with another that it is accountable to. For example, Commissions are arms of the Central Committee.

There are not organizational bodies that are free-standing, and the same goes for organizational channels.

Leadership at every level needs to be accountable. We favor individual responsibility with collective oversight. This means we should avoid situations where projects and the execution of plans do not have a specific person responsible for them.

Comrades should refrain from trying to get comrades from other cities to move to their Districts. Comrades who wish to move to another city should contact the Center so we can help the District prepare. Districts will accept comrades from other Districts as members (regardless of local composition guidelines, etc.)

Consultation is a good thing. When a leading body wants to do something that impacts a lower body or draw someone into a more demanding area of its work, the lower body should be consulted with. For example, if a Commission wants to take an important local leader into its leadership body it is good to consult with the District. Consultation is a good practice, but it is not same as a veto power.

Final note

We don't want to be a federation or network. We will not be a talking shop. We want to win. ML, a correct line, and strong organization built on democratic centralism will allow us to do just that.