

# BACU

## Democratic Centralism

In "left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder" Lenin gave a good example of dealing with a question in a materialist and not abstract manner with his handling of the question of democratic centralism. Following is an extensive quote because it shows both the need for centralism and the prerequisites for centralism.

"I repeat: the experience of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has clearly shown ~~to~~ even to those who are incapable of thinking or have had no occasion to give thought to the matter that absolute centralism and rigorous discipline in the proletariat are an essential condition of victory over the bourgeoisie.

This ~~is~~ often dwelt on. However, not nearly enough thought is given to what it means, and under what conditions it is possible. Would it not be better if the salutations addressed to the Soviets and the Bolsheviks were more frequently accompanied by a profound analysis (Lenin's emphasis) of the reasons why the Bolsheviks have been able to build up the discipline needed by the revolutionary proletariat?

...The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of the proletariat's revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and--if you wish--merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people--primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct. Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning. On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement."

Proletarian discipline then, as well as theoretical clarity, absolutely must be attained but neither will come into existence simply by recognizing their necessity. Correct theory and discipline must be fought for ~~for~~ from the outset but both are in turn a reflection of our experience in building a revolutionary movement with real roots among the masses. Otherwise, in the ~~place~~ place of theory you would often have dogma, meaningless words. In place of discipline you can easily have intimidation and forced unity, rules and regulations having little relation to the achievement of practical tasks.

Many of us have seen examples of this kind of discipline in other organizations. In an inexperienced movement with an untested leadership and political line, with very little opportunity to gain criticism from the masses in the course of actual struggles, there is a danger of demanding agreement on the resolution of questions that, as yet, no material basis exists for their complete resolution.

This is especially true in regard to small localized organizations such as BACU. Even the experience of a national movement, limited as it is, cannot be adequately summed up within the much more limited scope of work of a local org.

The fragmentation of the movement is an indication that no truly revolutionary party exists. Under such conditions the freest and broadest discussion must be carried on among communists. For communist to instead be bound to the tight centralism of a particular org. at the present time would be to raise form over content, to create a formality that would be a weapon against, rather than for, the achievement of political unity. Because of today's particularities, we stress democracy over centralism more than it would be correct to do so at other times.

At the same time, the recognition of the need for centralism and the partial practice of centralism must be developed. Even a broad mass org. must, to some degree, have unity of action. This is far more true of a communist org. on any level of development. The development and carrying out of a political line, the potentially vast and varied scope of communist work demands the willingness of members to subordinate their individual inclinations to a collective course of action. While a member may be open about his political differences with the org., unity of action around the agreed upon tasks of the org. must be maintained.

Of course, this formulation does not resolve all problems, there are many grey areas. "Unity of action", for example, could be interpreted in a strict or looser sense. We should recognize that willingness to carry out many political tasks depends partially on confidence in the org. and its leadership and that can only be built over a period of time through the way tasks are carried out. Even then, not every comrade will carry out every task with an equal amount of enthusiasm. Consistent unwillingness to abide by or take seriously collective decisions, however, reflects individualism that must not be tolerated in a communist org. To do so would encourage a liberal attitude that would insure that mistakes are not corrected and the weaknesses of members are not struggled against.

We may often be restrained from an over-use of collective discipline because of a recognition that, given the overall level of development, majority solutions may often not be correct. This should never, however, stop us from approaching differences with comrades in a critical spirit and fighting the ability to be self-critical as well.

Openly expressing disagreements always has its limits as well. If at any time in the future a person agrees with so little that the org. is saying that he is playing a purely critical role, he probably should not be in the org.

Internally, the right to express differences should be approached in a comradely way. Differences should be expressed with the clear aim of persuading the entire org., including those we disagree with. We should always avoid spreading division and distrust. Cliquishness and even factionalism and splits can come very easily. It's much more difficult to struggle correctly for unity.

To sum up, it should be clear that democratic centralism is not simply a set of rules or a formula, applied anytime anywhere. It is a method of combining the greatest possible initiative of members with the greatest possible discipline, unity and organizational effectiveness.

(Organizational rules are contained in the "Recruitment paper" and the minutes of the last general meeting.)