

**INNER  
PARTY  
DEMOCRACY**

**COMMUNIST PARTY**

*Price 15p*

*Published in accordance with the Resolution adopted by the 25th Congress of the Communist Party (April 19-22, 1957) as follows:*

This Congress endorses the principles of the Majority Report of the Commission on Inner-Party Democracy as amended by the Congress.

It instructs the new Executive Committee to publish a finalised text of the Majority Report as amended.

It further instructs the new Executive Committee to draft new Party Rules and a statement on Congress procedure for submission to the Twenty-Sixth Congress, and to prepare a statement on Party discussion procedure.

It refers all amendments which have not come before the Congress to the new Executive Committee for consideration in the light of the decisions of the Congress.



THE COMMUNIST PARTY  
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## **THE ORGANISATIONAL PRINCIPLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY— DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM**

The organisation of a political party has to be such as will achieve its aims. The aim of our Party is that the working class and its allies should win political power and use it to end capitalism and build socialism. To win political power is no easy task for the working people of Britain. It demands a long, bitter, continuous and complex struggle, taking many forms and ranging over many fields. It is a struggle against an experienced, cunning and ruthless ruling class, with great resources and a highly centralised machine at their disposal. To reach victory in this struggle the working class requires leadership by a Party based on Marxism-Leninism, a Party which is voluntary and democratic, yet at the same time united and self-disciplined.

Our Party life, therefore, has to be the combination and interaction of a politically alert and active membership and a strong leadership. The combination of democracy and centralism is necessary to develop a Party which can act as the vanguard of the working class and fulfil its duty of leading the working class. This combination is possible because all of us have the same aims, share a common Marxist-Leninist outlook, and are engaged in the same struggle. Membership and leadership are essential to each other, each has its contribution to make to the victory of our common efforts.

From experience in the class struggle in all countries, there has evolved the principle of democratic centralism. This makes possible the required combination of a strong centralised leadership and democratic participation of all members in Party life. The membership democratically elects and supports the leadership, which accounts for its work to those who elect it. The leadership gives that central guidance which is necessary to combine the efforts of all members in the unified struggle to realise the aims of the Party.

Inner-Party Democracy therefore consists of the joint activity of the branches and the leading committees in discussing the problems that arise in the course of the struggle. The experience, views, and moods of the people have to be taken into account when Party policy is determined. Party policy then has to become the subject of propaganda and organisational work among the people, so that they are won to understand and support it and to take action for it. It is in the course of discussion on the experiences and problems of the struggle that the initiative and political creative thought and capacity for leadership are developed, and the level of understanding continually raised. In this way the Party develops a vigorous and healthy political life and simultaneously strengthens and improves both its democracy and its centralism.

The Party needs to be united and militant to achieve its aims.

That is why democracy and centralism in our Party act in co-operation, not in conflict with one another. The unity of the Party can only exist if all members are welded together by a voluntary conscious discipline accepted by all. Ideological unity, through the understanding of Marxism-Leninism, solidarity in action, are the source of the strength of the Party.

The National Congress is the sovereign authority of the Party and its decisions are binding on all leading committees, all Branches and all members. When Congress is not in session it is the Executive Committee elected by it which guides the activity of the Party, carrying out the decisions of the National Congress, and uniting all the Party organisations into a single force.

#### **Democratic Centralism means:**

- (i) The right of all members to take part in the discussion and formation of policy and the duty of all members to fight for that policy when it has been decided.
- (ii) The right of all members to elect and be elected to the collective leaderships of the Party at all levels, and to be represented at the National Congress, the highest authority of the Party.
- (iii) The right of all members to contribute to the democratic life of the Party and the duty of all members to safeguard the unity of the Party. While carrying out the policy and decisions of the Party, members who disagree with a decision have the right to reserve their opinions and to express their views through the proper channels open to them as laid down in the Party Rules.
- (iv) The right of the elected higher organisations to make, between Congresses, decisions which are binding on lower organisations. The duty of the higher organisations to consult to the maximum possible before making such decisions, and to explain fully the reasons for them. The duty of the lower organisations to express their views before the decision is taken by the higher body and to carry it out when it is made.

The principle of democratic centralism, applied in relation to our own conditions, will ensure the maximum democracy combined with the necessary centralism in our Party life. But it is not in itself, and no organisational principle can be, a guarantee that we shall achieve our aims. The guarantee is that throughout the whole of our work we firmly adhere to the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism, win the decisive organisations of the Labour movement for our policy and programme, and build the Communist Party as a mass organisation of the working class.

#### **Objections to Democratic Centralism**

*Some comrades argue that democratic centralism is a Russian idea imposed on British Communists by the Russian Communists and the Communist International.*

We reply that the principle of democratic centralism arose out of the experience of the British Labour movement, just as it arose from the experience of the working class in other lands, and for similar reasons—the working class found itself in struggle against a class enemy who had established a highly centralised direction of his forces.

In the period 1850-1880 the British trade unions developed what was then called the “New Model” of organisation. The ideas and practices included the conceptions that an elected Congress was the decisive policy making body, that its policy should be binding, that central organs and committees should have authority. Carefully elaborated rules and constitutions set out to combine democracy with centralisation and discipline.

Long before the ideas of Lenin had an impact on the British Marxists, they were coming to see the need for combining democracy with unity, centralism and discipline. They learned this lesson the hard way. The pioneer Marxist organisations, the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League, the Socialist Labour Party, and the British Socialist Party had bitter experience of the disastrous results of factions, personal groupings, internal warfare of conflicting groups, personally owned and controlled journals. Towards the end of his life, after long experience of feuds and factions, William Morris made a plea for Party discipline. In a lecture “What Should Be: What Will Be” he said: (Conserved in note form.)

“Ought to have working men in order to break down the habit of class members, but get good men and good for the purpose where you can. And let them be under good Party discipline. This Party must be and will be, but I fear will be somewhat long in coming. . . .”

On 25 June 1914 the national organiser of the British Socialist Party, which was later to become a component of the Communist Party, wrote in *Justice*:

“In a democratic voluntary body like the B.S.P. the restraint of discipline and the adoption of orderly business methods are matters that do not always get the attention they deserve. By ‘discipline’ I mean a cultivation of the spirit of solidarity and Party loyalty. ‘Business method’ I interpret as being simply the adoption of orderly systematic procedure, without which efficiency is impossible. I begin therefore by defining the status and relations of a Branch to a Party as a whole. A branch of the B.S.P. is not an autonomous independent body. It is part of a national organisation. And some of us need to be reminded occasionally that the part is not greater than the whole.

“Within certain limits of course, a branch has, and must have, freedom of action. But the exercise of that freedom must never be allowed to interfere with the movement or policy of the main body—the National Party. Members must never lose sight of their connection with the Party, however much they

may value their local associations and personal relations.

“Then, the relations between a branch of the B.S.P. and the Executive officials are not the relations of master and servant. Nor are they the relations of a Government and its subjects. We do not elect a National Executive Committee in order to provide a target for ‘rebel’ sharpshooters and disgruntled critics. Nor do we appoint officials, expecting them to do the work that can only be done by the co-operative action of the Party as a whole. National committees and officers are not self-elected. They are appointed to carry out the instructions of the Party, and to look after the general line of national organisation, as distinct from local organisation. They represent the national Party, and while I am quite ready to admit that individually and collectively the responsible committees and officers of the B.S.P. are not infallible, I do assert that they are entitled to, if they do not always get, the goodwill and support and co-operation of the people who elect them.

“The spirit of those who are never tired of setting what is called ‘the rank and file’ against those who have the misfortune to be called the ‘leaders’, either in Trade Union or Socialist branches, is the spirit of Anarchism and not of Social Democracy. Encourage it and you may change your Party headquarters from Maiden Lane to North West Ham, or from London to Manchester, or Kidderminster, but you will be doing nothing to develop a national Party capable of national effort.”

Much else could be quoted to show that British experience and practice was one of the main and earliest sources of democratic centralism.

The French, German, Russian and other Labour movements reached similar conclusions. Lenin and his associates in the early days of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party drew extensively on the experiences of the German Social Democratic Party and the writings of Karl Kautsky. Both *What is to be Done?* and *One Step Forward: Two Steps Back* contain a number of references to German Socialist practice quoting Kautsky as authority.

It is wrong to describe democratic centralism as a Russian invention and wrong to allege it was imposed on our Party. The principle arose from British and other experience and it was adopted by our Party as a result of our experience.

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*Some comrades argue that democratic centralism was necessary in conditions of illegal struggle against Czarism, and in conditions of war and revolution, but is not necessary in the present conditions in Britain.*

We reply that the principle of democratic centralism was evolved in the course of the class struggle from the varied experience of different parties under varying conditions. The British Marxist

organisations worked under legal conditions, the German Social Democratic Party knew legal and illegal periods, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party passed through illegal, semi-legal and legal conditions.

Whether in peace or war, during stagnation or revolution, in legality or illegality, democratic centralism remains the essential and effective organisational principle because the aim of the Party remains though the conditions of the struggle change.

It is true that a stricter degree of Party discipline is necessary under illegal than under legal conditions. But it is quite wrong to regard democratic centralism as meaning only strict discipline. In fact Lenin pointed out at the Second Congress of the Communist International that democratic centralism could not be so fully developed under illegal as under legal conditions.

The struggle of the working class for political power and socialism, prolonged and difficult in all countries, is particularly so in Britain. The British capitalist class is the oldest, most experienced, cunning and certainly (ask our colonial comrades) not the least ruthless. The British state machine is a well-organised weapon of British capitalism. The capitalist press, B.B.C. and TV, and the whole system of propaganda and education is extremely effective. Capitalist ideas have a stronger hold on the British working class than in most countries, and the capitalist machine is strongly centralised.

It is true that the road to Socialism in Britain will differ in many ways from the road taken in Russia, that in some ways it may be easier. But it is wrong, un-Marxist and dangerous to think that the British workers can reach Socialism<sup>†</sup> without long, bitter and complicated struggles in which the capitalist class will do its utmost by all means, including fraud and force, to prevent the victory of the working people.

It is equally dangerous to imagine that peace, so necessary to the people and to the advance of the working class, can be maintained without the greatest vigilance and activity of the working class and all who do not want war.

It would therefore be foolhardy and irresponsible to suppose that the British working class can win power and build socialism without a strong, disciplined and centralised Party.

In Britain the experience of two centuries of struggle points to the necessity of democratic centralism in the Communist Party and for its applications in forms appropriate to British conditions.

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*Some comrades argue that democratic centralism is unacceptable to British public opinion and is not understood by the Labour movement.*

In reply we say that the principle that members of Labour organisations assist in the discussion and formation of policy but that the

decisions taken by democratically elected statutory bodies are binding has long been familiar in the Labour movement and is common workshop practice.

That the common interest demands that factional groupings be not permitted, that there should be one, not two or many, centres of leadership, that journals be controlled by the organisation concerned and not by self-appointed individuals, that discipline and unity in action are essential, that splinter tactics and breakaways mean splitting the front—all this is widely accepted and understood without great difficulty by those with experience of the class struggle, particularly in factory, pit and depot.

And if such principles are found necessary by trade unions, who have to lead only a section of the working class, and have to provide for the clash of contending ideologies and political views among their members, surely they must be practised even more strictly by the Communist Party, which is based on a single ideology—Marxism-Leninism—and has to give leadership to the whole working class movement. The Communists bear the brunt of the struggle; they are smeared, abused and persecuted. Their responsibility is enormous. Their membership of their Party is voluntary. No one pays them to join, though they are often offered pay to desert. But in order that the efforts and sacrifices of the Communists may lead to the victory of the working class the Communist Party must have discipline, voluntary and self-imposed through understanding and conviction, but still discipline.

Why do we complain of the discipline imposed by the Labour Party and yet demand a higher level of discipline in the Communist Party?

The Labour Party was formed as a co-ordinating body to which many trends of Socialist and Labour opinion, right, left and centre, could affiliate. We agree with the need for such a comprehensive organisation. What we complain of is that discipline is used in the Labour Party to silence or to exclude the most consistent left wing trends. Surely an organisation formed to bring all trends together should allow all trends to express their views?

But the Communist Party does not admit all views, it is a body of like-minded Marxists and therefore has different rules from the Labour Party.

There is nothing in democratic centralism alien to the British Labour movement. We should remember that it is an old tactic of reaction to smear militant action as alien. The early Radicals were dubbed "Jacobins", the early Marxists "Germans", and the early Communists "Bolsheviks".

Democratic centralism is easily understood and acceptable to those who recognise and have experience of the class struggle. There is no secret about it, but we are at fault for not having done much more to explain it to our own members and in the Labour movement.

*Some comrades argue that democratic centralism was the cause of the cult of the individual, and of the consequent errors and abuses associated with it, in the Soviet Union during the period 1933-53.*

We reply that this statement is the opposite of the truth. The truth is that the cult of the individual developed through the *violation* of the practices of democratic centralism.

That the violation of the practices of democratic centralism was necessary to the growth of the cult of the individual is shown in the resolution of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. dated 30 June 1956. This resolution tells us that the plenary meetings of the Central Committee and congresses of the Party were held irregularly and later not held at all for many years; that Stalin was, in fact, above criticism; that his erroneous formula on the increasing sharpness of the class struggle under Socialism was used to justify gross violations of Socialist law; and that party and government control over the security organs was superseded by Stalin's personal control and the standards of justice by his individual decisions.

Thus, while democratic centralism means the right of all to elect and be elected to the collective leadership of the Party at all levels what took place in the C.P.S.U. in 1933-53 was a violation of this right since elections at highest levels took place less and less frequently, the Eighteenth Congress taking place in 1939 and the Nineteenth Congress in 1952, and the Party Constitution in regard to elections disregarded.

Thus, while democratic centralism means the right of all to take part in the formation of policy, what took place in the C.P.S.U. in 1933-53 was a violation of this right, since Party members, even members of the Central Committee, were less and less drawn into formation of policy, and policy was more and more being decided in a small circle dominated by Stalin.

Thus, while democratic centralism means the right of all to contribute to the democratic life of the Party, to defend the unity of the Party, and while carrying out the decisions of the Party to make known any disagreement through the proper Party channels, what took place in the C.P.S.U. in 1933-53 was a violation of this right, and, consequently, the collective could not make its contribution while individual comrades expressing disagreement in a correct way were penalised and often persecuted. The unity of the Party was secured from the top by bureaucratic methods instead of being secured by the collective effort and proper functioning of the Party.

Therefore in this period in the C.P.S.U. the practice of democratic centralism was replaced at the top by the arbitrary decision of policy by an individual and by the intervention of the State Security organs in Party affairs.

In the efforts to correct these mistakes and abuses the C.P.S.U.

is laying great emphasis on the development of Party democracy in accordance with the Constitution and Rules of the Party which are based on the principle of democratic centralism.

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While rejecting these criticisms of democratic centralism the following sections of this statement make proposals to overcome weaknesses in our present practice.

## **PARTY DEMOCRACY IN THE DISCUSSION AND FORMATION OF POLICY**

To give leadership the Party has to put forward a clear Socialist policy—long term and short term. To reach such a policy demands a creative study and development of Marxist-Leninist theory and the application of Marxist principles to the specific problems facing the British people.

Party discussion therefore takes place within the framework of the principles of Marxism-Leninism. There is full freedom in the discussion to apply and develop Marxism-Leninism to our problems and to dispute on the many controversial issues which arise. But there is not, and cannot be, freedom in the Communist Party to advocate ideas contrary to Marxism-Leninism, ideas hostile to the interests of the working class. To allow this would be to allow the enemy to do his work within the Party. The Party discussion procedure is laid down so as to ensure the democratic rights of individual members and of elected leadership. It is also necessary to ensure that the content of the discussion is such as is relevant to the questions of policy which have to be decided.

But the formation of policy is not the job of the leadership alone. It demands the maximum active participation of the whole Party membership. The Party must draw on the views and experience of all members of the Party and, indeed of the whole Labour and progressive movement. The problem is, how can this best be done?

In the past the Party leadership at different levels has not made sufficient effort to promote discussion and to draw on the views and experiences of Party members, nor has enough been done to secure the atmosphere in which Party members would freely express their views, and in which ideas could be freely argued and debated.

A marked improvement in this respect has taken place since the Twenty-Fourth Congress of our Party, and in order to maintain and extend this it is necessary to examine in detail how measures can be taken to draw still more deeply and continuously on the views and experiences of the Party membership.

The most important place for the formation of Party policy is the Party Congress and it is necessary therefore to give special attention

to the pre-Congress discussion and to discussion at the Congress itself.

### **Pre-Congress Discussion**

The discussion statement and resolutions prepared for the pre-Congress discussion should very clearly bring out the main political problems, giving special emphasis to the various controversial problems that Congress needed to resolve.

### **Free Expression of Contending Views**

It should be accepted without any doubt, and clearly stated, that contending views should be freely expressed in the pre-Congress discussion, not only in the branches but also in the Party press, and that it is necessary for much greater space in our press to be allocated to pre-Congress discussion than has hitherto been the case.

### **Branch Meetings on Congress Questions**

The leadership at all levels must encourage much greater attention by the Party branches to the pre-Congress discussion. At least one meeting should be devoted to each important pre-Congress document, and every encouragement given for branches to send in their amendments to and points on these documents.

### **Branch Resolutions**

A longer period should be devoted to pre-Congress discussion and resolutions submitted by Party organisations should be made available to all delegates and Party organisations as early as possible before the Congress.

### **Congress Discussion**

The conduct of Congress discussion is determined by Congress itself. As the highest authority of the Party, Congress itself decides the timetable and procedure on the basis of proposals submitted to it. This power must remain in the hands of delegates to Congress, who take their decisions on what and how they will debate in the light of the existing circumstances.

(Congress delegates are elected by the branches, who have the unfettered right to choose, and the obligation to send, their best political people. But the branch has not the right to mandate its delegate, since this would in fact place the branch above the Congress. Congress is the sovereign body, it collectively has the power to decide controversial questions: therefore every delegate must have the right to vote as he thinks fit after hearing the discussion at Congress. The delegate's duty is to express the views of his branch, and his own views, and to listen to the views of other delegates. He has to form his judgment and vote. He could not carry out this duty if he were mandated, since he would then have to vote irrespec-

tive of the Congress discussion and the whole purpose of Congress would be nullified.)

Congresses in the past have devoted insufficient time to the debating and thrashing out of our policy and too much time to the exchange of experiences. For this reason it is essential for much of the debate and clash of opinion which always takes place in the Standing Orders Committee to be taken from that Committee to the floor of the Congress itself. This must be borne in mind in the selection of speakers, so that opposing views can be brought into the open Congress, and by decision of Congress, given adequate time to develop their case. It is essential too for the main Congress reports to raise clearly the major political problems which need to be discussed. In addition, while many branch resolutions will be covered by the debate on the main reports, other controversial branch resolutions involving important policy questions should be grouped together and debated in Congress, time being given for this purpose.

Such a change in orientation is necessary if delegates are to play their full role in the formation of Party policy, but it is important not to swing to the other extreme and forget that another important aspect of Congress is precisely the exchange of experiences in the various fields of work and struggle.

### **Discussion Between Congresses**

#### **The Executive Committee—the Responsible Leadership of the Party**

Between Congresses, the Executive Committee is the responsible leadership of the Party. It will develop policy in accordance with Congress decisions but events may make it necessary to take decisions without prior consultation with the membership. No serious political party can withhold such a right from its executive.

#### **Consultation with the Membership**

Wherever possible, in the elaboration of new policy between Congresses, the Executive Committee should consult with the membership, put forward views for consideration, ask the Party members to express their views through the branches and district committees, and open the Party press to the appropriate discussion.

#### **Resolutions to Higher Committees**

Branches and District Committees should be encouraged to register their opinions on particular issues by sending resolutions to higher committees, and where this is done the higher committee to which it is addressed must consider it and reply.

#### **Consultation with Specialist Groups**

Where the Executive Committee is putting forward policy for specific fields of work it should, wherever possible, consult first the

appropriate grouping of comrades, as for example those working in the cultural sphere, in the social services, or in a particular industry. This has in fact usually been done, and should be a normal practice.

### **Party Discussion for Decision and Action**

Finally, discussion such as described here has as its normal aim the reaching of firm policy decisions, indicating action, and it is essential that such discussion takes place in the branches, the basic units of the Party, and in the elected area, district and executive committees of the Party. It is the duty of all comrades to take their problems and viewpoint *into their Party branch* and assist in thorough discussion there of policy questions.

### **Other Types of Discussion**

There are other types of discussion where decisions are not necessary or not possible. Many discussions of an educational character on problems of theory can and should take place over a prolonged period. There are problems connected with art and science such as socialist realism or genetics when the Party is not called on to take decisions. In such fields the exchange of contending views may be continuous.

### **Discussion in the Party Press**

Discussion has not in the past been given sufficient space in the Party press nor developed with sufficient freedom. A big improvement has been made in this respect since our Twenty-Fourth Party Congress, particularly with the initiation by the Executive Committee in *World News* of the discussions on Working Class Unity, on the British Road to Socialism and on Inner-Party Democracy, and this needs to be continued with each section of the Party press carrying discussion in an appropriate form.

Much more needs to be done to draw the membership into the development of Marxist-Leninist theory in its application to British problems. We need to work collectively on a whole series of outstanding questions affecting the past, present and future of the British people.

The decision by the Executive Committee to produce a regular theoretical and discussion journal, publishing a number of articles with which the Editorial Board did not necessarily agree, should encourage the publication of contending views.

All sections of the Party press must come under the control of the Party leadership; editors and editorial boards have to edit and, therefore, have to exercise political judgement; have to select. This control must be exercised flexibly with appreciation of the need for different views to find expression and for the fullest provision of information.

The main function of the Party press, which is maintained and continuously supported by the Party membership, is to advocate the policy of the Party. There cannot be unrestricted right of publication of individuals and branches, but there must be the maximum publication of individual views and particularly of the collective views of branches and elected leading committees.

While we should realise the difficult problems of short-staffed editors, when articles are rejected reasons should be given to those who submitted the article and they can, if they wish, raise the matter with the appropriate committee of the Party.

Finally, whilst the Executive Committee must take steps to promote the greatest discussion in the Party press, this does not mean that discussion on particular issues once opened should be left to take its own course without guidance. The Executive Committee has not in fact done sufficient in recent months to express its views in the discussion or to guide the discussion. Guiding the discussion does not mean limiting it. The most fruitful results will be obtained by the full participation of the Executive Committee.

#### **Discussion Procedure**

Congress considers that a document on the procedure of Party discussions should be prepared that would be continuously available to the Party and would serve as a guide to leading committees, editorial boards, and to the Party as a whole.

## **PARTY DEMOCRACY IN THE ELECTION OF LEADING COMMITTEES AND OFFICIALS**

The method of election of the Executive Committee is the most important problem for consideration under this heading.

Many questions have been raised about our previous experience and methods. Are they sufficiently democratic; is the method such that the leadership is able to perpetuate itself? Is it the retiring Committee which decides the composition of the new leadership? Proposals have been put forward ranging from the abandonment of the present method altogether to various modifications in it.

#### **What Kind of Executive Does Our Party Need?**

It is the duty of the Executive Committee to lead the Party in between Congresses. It has to give leadership in each stage of the struggle and at each new development or turn of events. It must be able to guide the Party in leading and striving to unify the working class and its allies in the struggle for immediate gains and also for the advance towards the winning of political power and the building of Socialism. The Executive has the duty of basing its decisions upon the decisions of the Party Congress, but should there be

developments which have not been provided for or a major change in the political situation, it is the duty of the Executive to give the necessary leadership in the interests of the Party and the working class. The Executive has to account for all its actions to the Party Congress.

In order to cope with these heavy responsibilities, the core of the Executive has to be composed of the strongest and most capable political comrades which the Party can provide; those with the best grasp of Marxism-Leninism, the widest experience, proved Party loyalty and personal integrity. Around this core there should be gathered comrades of political capacity from different spheres of Party work, particularly the major industries, the key professions, the women and youth. The Executive has to be a collective leadership combining political capacity, theoretical knowledge and experience in the struggle. It has to be closely in touch with the membership and with the problems, ideas and moods of the people. It has to be receptive to new ideas and criticisms from below, while basing its decisions on its analysis of the situation, the policy laid down by Congress and the principles of Marxism-Leninism. This kind of Executive is necessary in order that the Party may advance a correct policy on all major issues and also be able to win the conviction for this policy and the necessary action by the working class, its various sections and its allies.

In 1946 a Party Commission formulated the points to be taken into consideration in the composition of the Executive. These are in no way a list of different categories. Not all of them can be given equal weight at any one time, and one comrade may well come under more than one of these headings. Moreover, first consideration has also to be given to the political record and standing of the comrade nominated. With some slight changes from the 1946 formulation we set out these points below, and suggest that they should continue to guide the Party in the composition of the Executive Committee:

- (i) A core of the politically strongest and most experienced comrades known to the whole Party.
- (ii) A combination of experienced comrades, with new comrades who are proving their loyalty and capacity.
- (iii) A proportion of comrades drawn from the major industries and the key professions.
- (iv) A proportion of comrades in leading positions in the Labour movement.
- (v) A proportion of comrades in direct contact with decisive Party organisations, including factory branches.
- (vi) A proportion of women comrades and young comrades.
- (vii) A relation between the composition of the Executive and the distribution of Party membership throughout the country and in industry.

### **Past Experience in the Method of Electing the Executive**

If we agree that an Executive composed in this way is necessary, then we have to find the most democratic method to achieve it. Before dealing with the various possibilities, it will be useful to recall the experience of our Party on this problem.

From 1920 to 1922 our Party followed the method inherited from the British Socialist Party of electing a Federal Executive based on geographical divisions. This was found unsatisfactory, since the members, in practice, tended to regard themselves as bearers of the views of their particular divisions and did not feel themselves representative of the Party as a whole. From 1922 to 1924 Congress adopted the ballot vote without recommendation. This also proved unsatisfactory, since the tendency was to vote for the best-known names. This gave undue weight to speakers and writers who, however valuable their contribution, did not make up the kind of Executive required.

From 1925 to 1943 Congress adopted the panel system. A Commission elected by Congress went through all nominations and drew up a panel of names. This was put as a whole to Congress, and delegates voted for or against it by show of hands. This method did ensure a balanced composition, but had the drawback that opposition to any individual name or support for an alternative name could in the last resort only be expressed by voting against the panel as a whole or by abstention.

In 1944-45 Congress returned to the method of ballot on all nominations, without recommendations. There was great dissatisfaction with the result, particularly the small number of comrades from industry and from outside London. In 1945 the newly elected Executive had in fact to co-opt six industrial workers from outside London. A Party Commission was appointed by Congress which went into many proposals and finally recommended a ballot plus a recommended list. This proposal, with detailed procedure, was submitted to every branch of the Party for discussion. Out of approximately 800 branches then existing, 203 reported their views, and only one voted against the recommendation, which was later adopted by the 1947 Congress.

A later Congress dispensed with the ballot paper, but gave any delegate the right to move the deletion of any individual name from the recommended list. In 1954 Congress again introduced the ballot paper on which all nominations appeared, together with the list recommended by the Panels Commission, and the 1956 Congress again operated this procedure.

Merely to state the many variations in the election procedure in the experience of our Party and the frequent changes made by Congress is to expose the falsity of the allegations that any particular method has been imposed upon the Party. This review also

exposes the falsity of the argument that comrades who have been elected repeatedly to the Executive since the early years owe their re-election to one particular method, since they have in fact retained their positions in spite of the changes in method. If such comrades have been repeatedly re-elected it is not due to a particular method but to the desire of Congress to have them on the Executive.

Out of this long and varied experience Congress has reached the method which combines secret ballot on all nominations with a recommended list. This method, with some developments additional to the practice at the 1956 Congress, is the most democratic means of securing the kind of Executive required, and it is here explained in detail, with the reasons for advocating it and various objections and alternatives to it examined.

### **The Secret Ballot on All Nominations with a Recommended List**

The main features of this method are:

- (i) The Party Congress, the only body representing the Party as a whole, determines the method of election and elects the Executive Committee.
- (ii) The delegates vote in secret ballot, each delegate having the individual right to cast his votes as he thinks best among all those who have accepted nomination. Congress elects an Election Preparations Committee responsible only to Congress. This committee has the duty to examine all proposals, questions, or objections brought before it by Congress delegates and to place before Congress a recommended list which it feels will best compose the new Executive.
- (iii) This recommended list is advice, and is not voted upon. Delegates who, having had discussion with the committee, disagree with its recommendations, or due to a change in the final list compared with the first draft, have not had opportunity to express their view, have the right to speak following its report and give their advice.

There are important distinctions between the practice of the panel system as operated for many years and the proposals now made for the secret ballot with recommended list. The panel system meant that the delegate could only vote for or against the panel as a whole. It was put to Congress for acceptance or rejection by show of hands. In the Panels Commission the Executive members felt bound to defend the Executive proposals. Often delegates were expected to propose the deletion of a name if they wanted to press for the inclusion of another name.

The recommended list is on the ballot paper together with all of those who have accepted, and the delegate votes as he pleases in secret ballot. The recommended list is the collective advice of the Election Preparations Committee after taking into account the

proposals of the retiring Executive Committee, all other proposals and the representations of delegates. Members of the retiring Executive on the Election Preparations Committee are not bound to the proposals of the retiring Executive. Delegates may make any proposal they please to the Election Preparations Committee and if not satisfied may give their advice to Congress.

This method fully assures to every delegate the democratic right to cast his votes as he thinks best. It thus includes all that is given to the delegate by so-called "free vote". But it greatly extends the democratic rights of the delegate by giving him the opportunity, through the Election Preparations Committee, to secure any information he requires, to question any nomination, to criticise any comrade nominated, to bring forward his own proposal or to object to the proposals of others. It greatly assists him in overcoming the difficulty when names unknown to him appear on the ballot paper, since he can seek information, and when the recommended list is reported to Congress the reasons why each name is included have to be given. In this way the recommended list, while retaining the delegate's freedom to vote as he wishes, gives him information that he cannot get in any other way.

#### **Arguments Used Against This Method**

Does this method enable the retiring Executive to perpetuate itself? This argument will not stand examination. The retiring Executive can only make suggestions to the Election Preparations Committee and give its reasons. All these proposals come under the closest examination in the Committee, which may or may not agree with them. The Committee, by presenting a first draft of the recommended list, affords every delegate the opportunity to challenge any name on this list before the final recommendation. After this, he casts his vote as he wishes.

In the case of those comrades who are best known for their long years of service to the Party, the delegate is just as free to vote for or against them as he would be if there were no recommended list, though he has the additional right to come into the Election Preparations Committee and criticise or object to the inclusion of any such name. In fact, the principal problem of the delegate is not his attitude to the best known names, since he has plenty of opportunity to decide his attitude to them. His real problem is the names which are either quite unknown to him or known only a little. Through the Election Preparations Committee he is given the possibility not merely of voting for individuals he may know and approve or against those of whom he disapproves, but of casting his votes in a way which helps to bring about the balanced Executive necessary. Therefore the allegation that this method means that the retiring Executive decides the new one says in fact that Congress

has no will of its own. This is completely untrue. Congress delegates are responsible comrades freely elected by Party branches and nothing can prevent them making their own decisions.

Some comrades suggest that the Executive should not be elected by Congress but by a direct ballot vote of the membership, either by post or in the branches. It is argued that this will give the members direct control of the election and consequently there will be more confidence in the result. But in fact it would do nothing of the kind; it would place great obstacles in the way of the election of comrades not known outside their own branches or districts, it would probably work against comrades from the smaller districts, it could easily lead to groups or canvassing for individual comrades. It would destroy the sovereignty of the Party Congress by establishing an Executive not elected by Congress and not responsible to it.

Some comrades suggest that the Executive either wholly or in part be elected by the Party districts. It is argued that this would insure that the district representatives fought for the views and resolutions of their districts, and would be able to report back better than at present. We reject this view, because this would mean in fact a Federal Executive, whether in whole or part. It would destroy the collective by introducing two categories of members, one of which would tend to feel its main responsibility was to its own district and not to the Party as a whole, nor to the Party Congress. In addition, there would be great practical difficulties, because of the unequal distribution of our membership throughout the country. It would also almost certainly result in the election of a number of additional full-time comrades as district representatives, thus increasing the proportion of full-time comrades in the Executive Committee.

### **The Responsibilities of the Retiring Executive Committee**

Some comrades take the view that the retiring Executive has no right to make recommendations on the composition of the new one. This would mean that the valuable experience of the retiring Executive would be lost to the Congress. On the contrary, it is the duty of the retiring Executive, arising out of its experience as a collective, and out of its estimate of its past work, to form an opinion as to which of its members should or should not be on the new Executive and to submit the reasons to the Election Preparations Committee. It is also its duty because of its knowledge of developments throughout the Party to draw attention to the names of new and developing comrades who could make their contributions to the new Executive. If it is understood that the suggestions of the retiring Executive are open to the fullest discussion in the Election Preparations Committee which has not only the right but the duty to change them if it feels by so doing it can

help Congress to get a better Executive, there is no danger of the retiring Executive Committee infringing the rights of Congress.

In the past it has been the practice of the Executive to put before this Committee the exact number of names required for the new Executive. The Executive must now be free to put before the Committee either fewer or more names than there are places. This would ensure that the retiring Executive discharged its obligations while emphasising the responsibility of the Election Preparations Committee as an organ of Congress. In cases where the Executive sees several comrades as equally suitable, say from a particular industry, or in cases where it sees the need for a particular qualification but does not feel it has all the necessary information before it, it could present this problem and not just a name to the Election Preparations Committee.

It is the duty of the Congress Election Preparations Committee, however, to bring before Congress a recommended list equal in number to the places on the Executive. If it does not do this it is in fact retreating from the responsibility Congress has placed on it.

### **The Composition of the Election Preparations Committee**

The composition of the Election Preparations Committee must be decided by Congress. If the Committee is to be capable of doing the job for which it is set up, it has to be composed not merely of responsible comrades but of comrades who also have knowledge of the cadres in their district. The practice has been to bring before Congress four nominations from the retiring Executive Committee and one from each Party District Committee irrespective of the number of members in the District. (This under present conditions results in a committee of twenty-four.) We believe that this is a satisfactory basis. In the case of the nominee from a District Committee, while the responsibility for the nomination must rest on the District Committee, we are of the opinion that there should be wider consultation. The branches should be informed of the role of the Election Preparations Committee and its importance in the election of the new Executive Committee. They should be asked to make their proposals to the District Committee to be taken into consideration when it nominates their district representative to the Election Preparations Committee from among the list of full delegates elected to the Congress from that district. The list of Executive and district nominations to the Election Preparations Committee should be published in the Party press at the earliest possible date. District nominees may not be members of the Executive Committee.

### **Procedure for the Election of the Executive Committee**

- (i) Three months before Congress, branches to be asked for

nominations, which must come from the floor of the branch meeting and be decided by a majority vote of those present. There is no limit to the number of nominations; what is important is that the maximum number of new comrades should be nominated and reasons given, and that the branch makes clear who of the retiring Executive it wishes to support or oppose. Wherever possible a full meeting should be devoted to the nominations and every member informed beforehand of the agenda. District Committees are also asked for nominations.

- (ii) Nominations are sent to the Party Centre, which writes to all comrades asking if they are willing to stand. All accepting are listed, with the information sent in by the branches. This, with all relevant information, is available for the Executive, for the Election Preparations Committee and, in a form of brief biographical information, for Congress delegates.
- (iii) The retiring Executive, after adequate discussion, puts forward from these nominations the proposals it wishes to place before the Election Preparations Committee and nominates four of its members for this Committee.
- (iv) The Election Preparations Committee is elected by Congress, which has before it four nominations from the Executive and one from each Party District Committee.
- (v) In view of the pressure of time at Congress, the nominated members of the Election Preparations Committee meet prior to Congress. This meeting is necessary in order that they bring the first draft of the recommended list before Congress as early as possible.
- (vi) The first report of the Election Preparations Committee brings before Congress the method of election and the first draft of the recommended list.
- (vii) The Election Preparations Committee then receives any delegates who wish to present a point of view.
- (viii) The final report of the Election Preparations Committee is given to Congress in closed session, and with adequate time. It should include a summary of the most important questions raised with the Committee, and in presenting the recommended list there has to be an explanation of the reasons for the inclusion of each name. Delegates who have raised questions with the Committee but are not prepared to agree to its list, or due to changes in the first draft have not had the opportunity of raising their point with the Committee, have the right to speak following this report. The reporter for the Committee has the right to deal briefly with such points. The report is advice and is not put for endorsement or amendment.
- (ix) Congress then votes in secret ballot. The voting paper carries

the names of all who have accepted nomination, the recommended list appearing first. Counting is carried out by tellers elected by Congress.

### **The Election of Other Leading Party Committees**

The principle of the recommended list should apply also to the election of District Committees, though the procedure may have to be simplified in view of the shorter time available at district congresses. Branch committees should be elected by show of hands on nominations made at the Annual General Meeting, without recommendations.

Area, borough and city committees are in a different category, since their powers are determined by the District Committees which authorise their formation. There are very important problems here, both in regard to their composition and function, and an examination of these problems must be made as quickly as possible by the Executive Committee.

### **The National Officers of the Party**

The question of the election of Party officials has also been raised. Some comrades argue that our officials should be elected by the membership as a whole, or by Congress. At present our Rules provide for the election of officers by the Party committee to whom they are responsible. The principle is that it is the leading committee as a collective which is in the best position to decide who should act as its officials. On this principle the Executive Committee at its first meeting after Congress elects the General Secretary and other national officials, and its Political Committee. Similarly, the District Committee elects its secretary and officials, and the district secretariat. This principle is correct and should be maintained. There are no grounds for the argument that the General Secretary is in an exceptional position, and therefore should be elected separately. The General Secretary is responsible to the Executive, is part of the collective leadership and should be elected by the Executive.

### **Full-time Party Workers**

In the same way the appointment of full-time workers must be made by the committees to whom they are responsible. Experience has shown the need for wide consultation before such appointments are made, so that Party members may make their suggestions and the Party branches, especially the comrade's own branch, may express their views. Because of financial reasons districts often find difficulty in securing full-time workers from their own district, and it is quite correct for them to consult the Executive Committee. It may well be a gain for the Party as a whole that full-time workers are transferred from one post to another, but in all cases the decision

rests with the District Committee concerned following consultation with the Executive Committee.

### **Co-option to Leading Committees**

On the question of co-option to leading committees, under normal conditions co-option to the Executive Committee should not take place, since the authority of the Executive is drawn from Congress and the Congress has an established procedure for deciding its composition. In relation to District Committees which sometimes face the problem of the loss of members through removal, change of work, or similar factors outside their control, the District Committee should be entitled to make co-options only to maintain its numerical strength and it should do so in consultation with the branches and the Executive Committee. Branch committees should have the right to co-opt, but should inform the next branch meeting and ask for endorsement.

## **PARTY DEMOCRACY IN ACTION FOR THE POLICY OF THE PARTY**

When the Party has democratically decided its policy and elected its leadership, it faces the need to carry out that policy. This means explanation to the workers, winning support, and the development of action. To do this all the Party organisations—executive, district committees and branches—have to act in unison. Therefore democratic relations of mutual confidence and co-operation between all Party organisations are essential.

The fate of Party decisions depends on what is done to make them understood and supported by the people. The Party depends on its members and organisations to maintain contact with the people and to make full use of its press. It is mainly through the work of the Party branches, in action for the policy of the Party, that the process of changing the political outlook of the worker can take place.

It is clear that much has to be done to remove causes of weakness and dissatisfaction. There are complaints of the absence of personal connections, insufficient consultation and exchange of views, a tone of command from the higher committees and of indifference by branches to certain decisions. It is said that full-time comrades do not draw others sufficiently into responsible work, and that subordinate bodies, for example district secretariats in relation to District Committees, often make decisions which should be made by the full committee. We are all aware of the considerable gap between the ability of our higher committees to make good decisions and their ability to lead the carrying out of these decisions.

## **Relations Between the Leading Committees and the Branches**

Weaknesses in the relations between the leading committees and the Party branches can have a most serious effect. Unless there is close connection, mutual respect and confidence, the leading committees will in fact be out of contact with large numbers of members. To further develop our inner-Party democracy the two-way flow of ideas between branches and the higher committees is essential. The branches in close contact with the people inform the higher committees of their problems, views and proposals. The higher committees in close contact with the branches make decisions on Party policy and give leadership to the entire Party in the fight to win people for this policy. Only by this two-way flow can the higher committees make correct decisions and win the support of the branches for those decisions. The greater the democracy in the life of the branches, and in their relations with the higher committees, the greater will be the ability of the higher committees to give direction and unity to the efforts of the whole Party membership, and the greater the ability of the branches to win influence among the people.

## **Responsibilities of Leading Committees**

Therefore the Executive and the District Committees should take on themselves the major responsibility for removing weaknesses and causes of complaint, for maintaining the liveliest contact with the branches, and for helping to develop the initiative and creative ability and political influence of all Party members and Party branches. In the past there undoubtedly has been too much emphasis on the centralisation and not enough on the democracy. The higher committees took insufficient interest in the branches, did not encourage them to voice their opinions and to take their own decisions in the work for which they were responsible.

There must be a decisive change in the attitude and work of the Executive Committee and the District Committees in this respect, a change directed towards emphasising democracy and to developing strong and numerous branches of our Party, making their full contribution in every sphere of Party life and activity.

It is for the Executive and District Committees to examine their own work in order rapidly to promote such a change of emphasis. They should do more to place Party problems before the branches and to draw upon the experience, criticism and proposals from the membership. When discussing policy the views of the branches should, wherever possible, be before the higher committees and be taken into account. When policy is decided and decisions made, these should not be formally passed on, they should be fully explained. While it would not be helpful for minutes of all leading bodies to be made public, or the standpoint of individual comrades to be made known (comrades often change their positions in the

course of discussion) it is essential for the leading committees to take the membership into their confidence, explaining the arguments for and against, and the theoretical and political considerations taken into account in arriving at the decision. The leading committees, having made their decisions, have to win understanding and conviction for them in the branches, and this requires not only personal contact and reporting, but taking part in the campaign for the decisions and helping to solve problems arising.

### **Responsibilities of the Branches**

The branches have continually to inform the higher committees of their experiences, their views and suggestions in relation to all that is going on and particularly what is happening in the factories and localities; what the workers are doing and thinking, and their attitude to the policy and activity of the Party. This contribution from the branches is vital if the higher committees are to do their work properly. If the branches are not making this contribution, then it is a major responsibility of the District Committee to help them to do so.

### **Democracy in the Party Branches**

The branches are the basis of Party democracy, because only in the branches can every Party member take part in the life of the Party and its activity among the people. Democracy at branch level requires that all members take part in the organised life of the branch and do not limit their contact to paying dues. This problem of drawing all the members into branch life is a very serious one.

The Executive, and particularly the District Committees, have to do much more to help all branches to develop the minimum requirements for inner Party democracy, including the obligations:—

(i) To hold a properly summoned regular annual general meeting, to discuss the work of the previous year, decide the line of future work, receive a financial statement and elect a branch committee.

(ii) To hold regular branch meetings at least monthly, where the main time is devoted to political discussion and the development of branch policy. There should be a brief opening statement, and all members should be encouraged to express their opinions frankly and without reservations. A variety of comrades should be given the opportunity both to open and to reply. It may sometimes be helpful to have a brief resolution before the meeting. It is important to acquaint the District Committee with the views expressed.

One of the most important duties of the branch committee, with the assistance of the membership stewards and dues collectors, is to interest every member in the work of the branch and to bring them to the meetings. The branch meeting should not be regarded

as just one more job, it should be seen as the very heart of branch life, a centre for political discussion where our members and others interested discuss the day-to-day struggle, the policy of the Party and the questions of Socialism.

### **Collective Work in the Leading Committees**

In some communications the view is expressed that while the Executive and District Committees observe the necessary forms of collective work—that is, regular meetings and opportunity for all members to contribute to discussion—nevertheless the content of the collective work is not satisfactory. They suggest that in practice a small number of the more experienced and politically able comrades tend to dominate.

Unequal development among individual comrades is inevitable and the leading committees need the best that every member can give. They should review the position of each comrade so that every member is able to feel that in addition to taking part in discussion he is playing a fully responsible part in the work of leadership. Opening and reply to discussion should be planned so that opportunities are given to all members. It is wrong if one or two comrades are the only ones regarded as capable of reporting on a particular question.

An all-round distribution of responsibility in the leading committees will do much to prevent the overloading of our full-time comrades, and it is one of the first responsibilities of full-time secretaries and organisers to see that such a proper distribution of work is operating.

Some comrades suggest that the Political Committee pre-determines what happens in the Executive Committee and the district secretariats pre-determine the decisions of the District Committees.

We consider it necessary clearly to establish the fact that the Political Committee is elected by and responsible to the Executive Committee. The Executive is a large number of comrades—at present forty-two—from all parts of the country. It cannot meet frequently enough to deal with every problem, nor give the time necessary for detailed work.

The Executive Committee therefore elects a Political Committee for the purpose of giving prompt and effective leadership on questions arising in between meetings of the full Executive. The Political Committee issues statements when necessary, prepares questions for the Executive, reports on the carrying out of decisions and controls on behalf of the Executive the departments at the Party Centre. The Political Committee takes decisions when emergency so requires and reports its actions to the Executive for endorsement or otherwise. Information on the work of the Political Committee is regularly before the Executive for questioning, endorsement or otherwise.

For similar reasons the District Committees elect a secretariat whose work is subject to their control.

### **Criticism and Self-Criticism**

Some comrades say that the Executive Committee does not set a sufficient example in the use of criticism and self-criticism. We consider that more should be done by the Executive in this respect and that when it makes a collective review of its work the most important lessons should be made available to the Party. The practice of criticism and self-criticism should be utilised by all Party organisations as part of the regular check on the carrying out of decisions. It will help to evaluate the experience gained and assist all comrades to make their full contribution to the collective.

### **The Unity of the Party Requires that Decisions are Binding on All**

When the Party takes a decision, it is laying down a course of action. The decision is made in order that it can be carried out. Once the decision is made, it is binding upon all Party members and organisations. Were the decision not binding on all, then the Party would in fact have two policies, not one. It would speak with two voices, it would confuse and divide the working class instead of uniting it around the struggle for the policy.

A clear distinction must be drawn between *the period leading up to a decision and the period following the decision*. Before the decision is made, it is the right and duty of all to take part in the discussion. The very differences expressed in the discussion help towards taking the correct decisions. Once the decision is taken then the Party unites its ranks to carry it out, otherwise there has been no purpose in having the discussion, the Party is divided, and a divided Party cannot give leadership. Therefore the rules of the Party provide that the minority accept the decision of the majority.

### **The Right to Reserve Opinion while Carrying Out the Majority Decision**

The duty to accept the decision does not mean that they have to agree with it. They have the right to reserve their opinion and to express their reservations to the higher bodies. Members of a branch committee who disagree with a decision taken by the committee may express their views to the branch meeting. Members of a secretariat who disagree may express their view to the District Committee, members of the District Committee to the Executive Committee or the District Congress, members of the Political Committee to the Executive Committee, members of the Executive to the Party Congress. When expressing their views, members in disagreement may ask for the matter to be reopened. When the higher bodies receive such expression of disagreement they have the duty to consider them and to reply, if necessary arranging discussion with the comrades con-

cerned. Since the work of all the leading committees comes under review at the next Congress, whether district or national, comrades who still maintain their disagreement have the right to raise the matter in pre-Congress discussion, and to ask their branch for support. If the volume of disagreement expressed on a particular decision is great enough, the leading committee will have to re-examine the question and if need be reopen the discussion.

But comrades who disagree, while they have these rights, have at the same time the duty common to all members of the Party, the duty to explain and fight for the decision among the workers.

Some comrades argue that this should not be the case. They want some kind of right to contract out by comrades who do not agree with the decision. They ask why it is necessary, after the majority decision, to surrender their individual liberty to go on opposing it, and whether it is compatible with personal integrity to carry out a decision with which they do not agree. They ask whether, if they feel a decision to be wrong, they are not under a moral obligation to campaign against it even if that breaks the rules of the Party.

These serious questions will repeatedly arise as the struggle gets sharper and more complicated. The Party fully understands the need for the individual comrade to feel satisfied in his own mind that he is doing the right thing. It is necessary time and time again to explain why the Party demands loyalty to its decisions, and why the discipline of the Party, voluntarily accepted, is binding upon all.

### **The Duty of All to Fight for Party Decisions**

Willingness to accept majority decisions, even if one disagrees, rests upon the existence of common ground shared by all. This common ground is our acceptance of the concepts of scientific Socialism, of Marxism-Leninism. That only Socialism will enable the workers to solve the problems arising under capitalism; that the achievement of political power by the working class is necessary to begin the construction of Socialism; that the Communist Party is the decisive Party of the working class and necessary to lead it to victory—this common ground continues to exist even when there are differences on various questions arising from time to time. If we accept this common ground, if we accept the aim of the Party as governing our political activity, then we see there is no surrender of personal integrity in the readiness to admit that “the majority is probably right even if I disagree with it”. To accept and work for the decision, even while disagreeing with it, is in effect to say “I am willing to give way to the majority with whom I disagree on this issue in order to maintain unity with them to achieve the major aims for which I joined the Party.”

### **Factional Activity**

Some comrades argue that the right to reserve one's views and to

express them to the higher bodies are not sufficient. Some claim that comrades on higher committees should have the right to express their disagreement downwards—that is, to the branches. But if that were done it would not be simply for information, it would become the first step in a campaign against the decision with which they disagree. Some comrades specifically claim the right to campaign in the Party and the press to get the decision changed and the right to form groups of like-minded comrades for this purpose. Some claim that such groupings should have the right to draw up their own political platform and to campaign for it, and that either the Party should be obliged to publish their platform or they should have the independent right to publish it.

These arguments amount to the proposal that factions should be permitted in our Party. A faction is a grouping of Party members outside the recognised organisations of the Party for the purpose of carrying on inner-Party struggle. We completely reject such a proposal.

The argument that such rights are needed because without them there is not the possibility of putting minority views before the Party is completely false. Every individual member has the right to advance his views in the proper places at the proper time, and the right to strive to win support for them. If he wins the support of his branch, the branch can send forward a resolution to the higher committees or to Congress. Every member has the individual right to communicate with the District Committee or the Executive Committee. In the pre-Congress discussion he has the right to send in his views to the Party press, which is obliged to publish all points of view. These rights are fully adequate to ensure that all views are brought before the Party and can, on the merits of the policy put forward, win support. Therefore, factions are unnecessary.

A faction means the splitting of the Party, the establishment of a competing centre of political leadership, the establishment of loyalties other than Party loyalty. It makes a mockery of democratic discussion in the Party organisations since the faction will not accept a decision with which it does not agree. Therefore, factions are dangerous.

Some comrades argue that if factions are not recognised, nevertheless factional activity will be carried on surreptitiously. This is not a reason for legalising factions. It is a reason for making clear to all members that our Party provides the proper channels for discussion and has a democratic method for making decisions, and that therefore those who resort to faction work injure the Party.

Some comrades argue that a distinction must be drawn between those who resort to factional activity with the malicious intention of injuring the Party and those who resort to it with the good intention of helping the Party. In practice, such a distinction cannot be maintained, for how can we decide on motives? It is the effects

which count, and the effects of factional activity are to by-pass and therefore weaken the Party branches and committees and to substitute for the democratic discussion of conflicting views the intervention of an outside force which comes to the Party meetings with its mind made up.

Some comrades argue for the right of any Party member, or members, to publish a political journal dealing with inner-Party affairs and to conduct such a journal independently of the Party leadership. The reason given is that Party channels of expression may be closed and the comrades thus driven to alternative means of expression. But if the channels are wrongfully closed, then it is necessary to get them open, not to establish alternatives. The way to get them opened is pressure through the Party branches and committees. Once such a journal is established it has to have people to write for it, finance it, circulate it and read it—that is, to establish an organisation apart from that of the Party. It thereby inevitably becomes the focus of factional activity, whether its originator had that intention or not.

Some comrades argue that while factions are normally impermissible, they should be allowed during the period of pre-Congress discussion. This argument disregards the fact that during pre-Congress period the widest possible discussion is opened and the Party press obliged to feature all views and proposals, and that every branch has the right to express its political views in a resolution for the agenda of Congress.

Some comrades even claim the right to use the columns of the non-Party press to express their criticisms of Party policy and to campaign to change it. This is in effect to accept the aid of outside forces in the 'struggle against one's own comrades, to bring these forces into the inner Party struggle, and to stab in the back the comrades who are fighting for the decision. Such actions appear to us incompatible with membership of the Communist Party.

Some comrades argue that if the decision is wrong, it is better to fight against it than accept it and work for it. On the contrary, the harder the struggle for a wrong decision, the quicker the error will become apparent, and the more ready the Party will be to correct the mistake. The majority may turn out to be wrong, especially at moments of rapid change in the situation, when what is new may be first appreciated by a minority. But the majority may be right. Only the Party can decide what policy is right. If we do not accept the democratic decision of the Party, we have anarchy and not democracy. If the minority, together with the majority, put the decision to the test of practice, both co-operate to bring in something beyond their own thinking to test the correctness of the decision. If there is not such a test the argument can go on and on, weakening the Party and bringing the danger of its being left behind or even overwhelmed by events.

## **The Discipline of the Party**

Party discipline is the collective will of the whole Party to maintain its unity and cohesion. Our discipline is based upon voluntary acceptance and understanding of the aims and the rules of the Party. The rules have been decided by Congress, and experience has shown the necessity of including sanctions against violation of the rules. These sanctions range from censure to expulsion from the Party.

Such organisational sanctions are a last resort. They are not to be applied until measures for discussion have failed. They are not to be applied mechanically, but with due regard to all aspects of the particular case. They are not to be applied arbitrarily, but in accord with the defined democratic procedure. They are not to be applied in any spirit of punishment, but only for the defence of the Party.

The absence of any complaints on disciplinary questions is an indication that the safeguards introduced into our rules by the 1948 Congress have in fact provided a disciplinary procedure which is fully adequate in defending the rights of the individual comrade, who is given the right of appeal up to the Party Congress.

## **Appeal to Congress**

The only criticism that has been raised with us relates to procedure at Congress. It is argued that any comrade who is appealing against disciplinary action should have the right to appear personally before Congress. At present the individual has the right to appeal to Congress, but not in person unless Congress so decides. We consider that this position should be maintained and that the report of the Congress Appeals Committee should clearly indicate to Congress if a request has been made to appeal in person.

The Congress Appeals Committee (which is of course quite a separate committee from the Appeals Committee of the Party which is elected at Congress for the forthcoming two years) is elected by Congress and is composed of delegates none of whom may be members of the Executive Committee or Party Appeals Committee.

Whilst the present method is satisfactory there should be some early consideration given to working out a detailed procedure for the conduct of an appeal to Congress, including the provision to the delegates at the beginning of Congress of information on the person concerned and the nature of the Appeal.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The vital questions raised in the discussion on Party democracy urgently require answers in order that our Party can do its duty in the critical political situation now developing. The main questions are "What should be the organisational principle of our Party?" and "How can we ensure the fullest possible growth of our Party democracy?"

We consider that the organisational principle appropriate and essential to the Communist Party is democratic centralism, the combination in practice of working class democracy with strong, centralised leadership. We have replied to arguments against this principle. Democratic centralism arose from British as well as international experience, our Party adopted it because it enabled the building of organisation corresponding to our political aims. It has enabled us to organise a Party which, under great stress, has maintained its Marxist-Leninist principles and its unity and has a record of service to the working class of which we may be proud. It has enabled us to build a Party in which even with its present weaknesses the membership has greater democratic rights to form policy and to elect the leadership than in any other party in Britain.

But a principle has to be applied and in the application errors can arise. We consider that our Party should now correct what we believe to have been a serious error—too great an emphasis on centralism and an insufficient emphasis on democracy. The tendency to consider a strong centralised leadership as sufficient has resulted in not enough being done to bring the membership into the discussion of Party problems and in failure to take sufficient practical measures to build strong Party branches even though the need was recognised and repeatedly stated.

We believe that the operation of the proposals embodied in this document (and endorsed by the 25th (Special) Congress) will ensure a decisive shift in the work of the Executive and the District Committees to promote the further growth of Party democracy in the branches, in the relations between Party organisations and in collective work at all levels.