

Democratic Centralism, Party Organization & Comradely Conduct



By the end of the class, all comrades should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What is democratic centralism?
2. How is democratic centralism applied in Workers World Party?
3. Why is democratic centralism critical as compared with looser, multi-tendency organizations?
4. How do we resolve political issues within the organization?



Primary Sources

From Ideological Tendency to Political Party of the Working Class, 1972
excerpt, by Sam Marcy

https://www.workers.org/wp-content/uploads/WWP_Marcy_TendencyToPoliticalParty_Excerpt1972.pdf

Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, 1921, by Vladimir Lenin

<https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/3rd-congress/organisation/guidelines.htm>



Opening Questions

1. Why are we building a vanguard party? Isn't that elitist?
2. What is the difference between proletarian democracy and bourgeois democracy?



An organization of the vanguard of the working class

“The organization of the party must be adapted to the conditions and purpose of its activity. There can be no absolutely correct, immutable organizational form for communist parties.

“Accordingly, it is absolutely crucial that all organizational work of communist parties in the capitalist countries be considered from the standpoint of constructing an organization which makes possible and ensures the victory of the proletarian revolution over the possessing classes.”

By Lenin

How can we make comparisons with parties from different contexts, periods, conditions?

“Every collective action, in order to be effective, requires a leadership. This is necessary above all for the greatest struggle of world history. The organization of the communist party is the organization of the communist leadership in the proletarian revolution.

“Leadership of the revolutionary class struggle presupposes, on the part of the communist party and its leading bodies, the organic tying together of the greatest possible striking power and the greatest ability to adapt to the changing conditions of struggle.”

By Lenin

Why is leadership a critical component?

What is democratic centralism?

“Democratic centralism in the communist party organization should be a real synthesis, a fusion of centralism and proletarian democracy. This fusion can be attained only on the basis of the constant common activity, the constant common struggle of the entire party organization.

“Mere formal democracy in the organization cannot eliminate tendencies toward either bureaucratism or anarchism, for both have found fertile soil in the workers movement on the basis of formal democracy. Therefore the centralization of the organization, that is, the effort to achieve a strong leadership, cannot be successful if we attempt to achieve it simply on the basis of formal democracy. Necessary above all is the development and maintenance of living ties and reciprocity-both within the party between the leading party bodies and the rest of the membership, and between the party and the working-class masses outside the party.”

By Lenin

Compare bureaucratism, anarchism, democratic centralism

“The Communist Party should be a working school of revolutionary Marxism. Organic links are forged between the various parts of the organization and among individual members by day-to-day collective work in the party organizations.

“In the legal communist parties most members still do not participate regularly in daily party work. This is the chief defect of these parties, which puts a question mark over their development.

“In order to carry out daily party work, every party member should as a rule always be part of a smaller working group—a group, a committee, a commission, a board or a collegium, a fraction or cell. Only in this way can party work be properly allocated, directed and carried out.”

By Lenin

Does your branch do this? How could it improve?

From a tendency to a party

“A tendency is basically concerned with propagating, promoting and shaping a political and ideological world outlook. It does not necessarily aim at winning large masses of adherents into a formal political organization. In fact, it may not be able to do so. This could be due to the unfavorable political situation. The objective situation may not have ripened sufficiently to attract large masses of people...

“To become a party it must go through a torturous, sometimes painful process of development. Under no circumstances can a political tendency seeking to revive revolutionary Marxism-Leninism become a party of the working class unless it acquires, in the course of the transition to a party, a considerable amount of practical political experience in the class struggle.”

By Marcy

Form follows function. Why would a small org have a looser structure? Vice Versa?

“A political tendency cannot make a transition to a political party unless it has accumulated within it a sufficient number of mature and tested cadres. Merely sharing a common world outlook, while indispensable for the formation of a political tendency, is inadequate unless it is accompanied by sharing common experiences in the struggle and sharing a common evaluation of the most critical and important struggles both the tendency and the movement have experienced.

“The transition from an ideological tendency to a party also implies that the fundamental political principles of the tendency are firmly established in its literature which, in reality, constitutes the program of the party.”

By Marcy



“No matter how well thought out a revolutionary program may be, or how accurately it depicts the nature of the driving forces of capitalist society and vigorously urges the overthrow of the capitalist system, it will become mere empty rhetoric unless it is geared to and engages in the struggle of the working class and oppressed people. Without struggle, without every-day participation in every possible form of class conflict no matter how small, dull, routine, or grandiose, the party of the working class will not become a reality. Struggles are the very essence of a revolutionary party.”

By Marcy

Actions speak louder than words. Why do we still need a strong organization?

“The concept of democratic centralism means the subordination of the minority to the majority. It means all lower party organizations submit to the discipline of the higher Party organizations and that all Party organizations are under the discipline of the national committee which in turn is responsible to the convention or congress.

"On a branch basis, the highest governing body in the branch is the branch membership meeting. The leading committee of the branch or the executive committee is responsible to the general membership meeting. Decisions made by the leading committee in between membership meetings are binding on the membership. The leading committees of the branch are generally elected by the branch.”

By Marcy



“Depending upon the size of the party, it is possible to have any number of factory, mine, mill, and district committees covering large production units or even industries in a special locality. All are under the jurisdiction of the constituted district, city, or state body of the party. No organization of the Party acts autonomously. This is particularly important where there are units of the Party in a mass organization, or where there are units of the Party which are attempting to build a mass organization although there may be only a few non-party people within its ranks.

"All leading bodies of the Party and all levels of leadership ordinarily are established by the elective method where that is possible and practical. Before a convention or congress of the Party it is generally necessary to have a period of internal discussion regarding matters to be taken up at the convention. It is generally considered a breach of discipline to discuss matters of an internal character outside of the Party.”

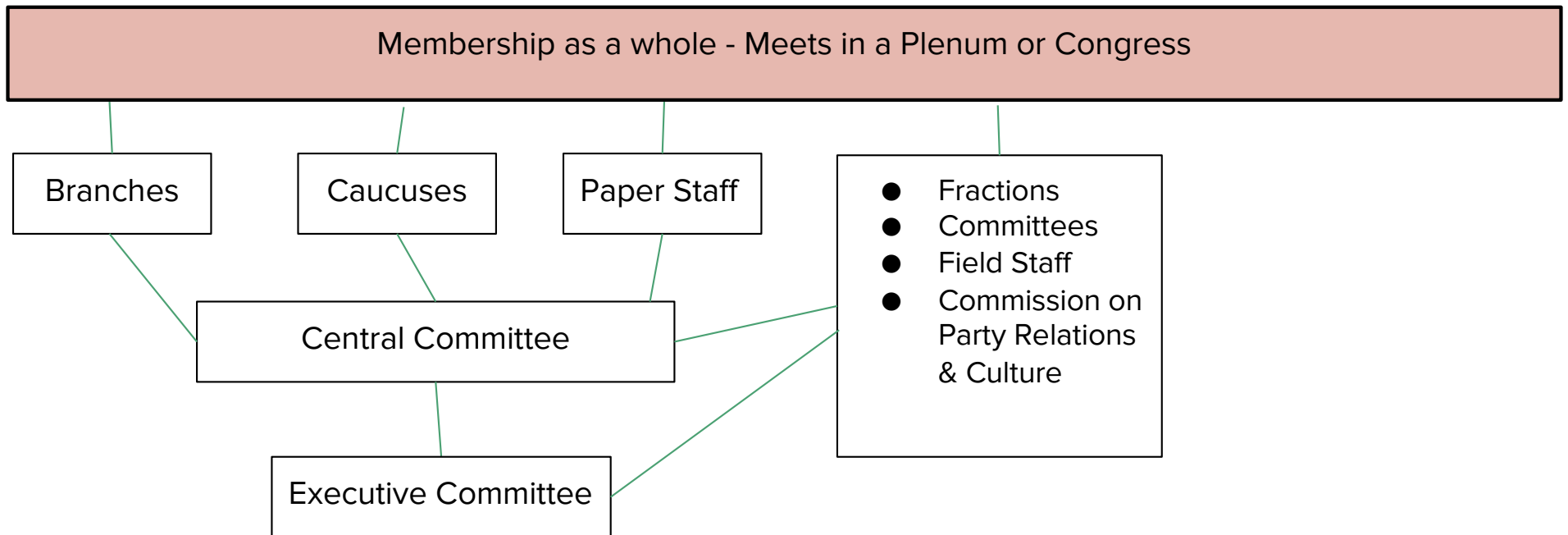
By Marcy



1. What are some examples of violations of democratic centralism?
2. What discipline is required as membership of a democratic centralist party?
3. How is membership in this type of party different than being in the Democratic Party or the Democratic Socialists of America?



Democratic Centralism in WWP



Let's Review:

1. What is democratic centralism?
2. How is democratic centralism applied in Workers World Party?
3. Why is democratic centralism critical as compared with looser, multi-tendency organizations?
4. How do we resolve political issues within the organization?
5. What questions do you have?

