

**Organisational  
Principles &  
Methods of the  
Democratic  
Socialist Party**

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# Introduction

The Democratic Socialist Party was founded in January 1972 by leaders of the revolutionary socialist youth organisation Resistance. In forming the DSP, they set out to build a revolutionary Marxist party that could win the Australian working class to the perspective of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist rule and the organisation of a classless, socialist society.

The organisational principles and methods of functioning that have guided the Democratic Socialist Party since its foundation have been based on the lessons drawn by the international Marxist movement over the last 150 years, as well as those accumulated by the DSP itself. This pamphlet brings together a number of talks presented by national leaders of the party on this topic to a new generation of Resistance leaders in the early 1990s. ■



# The Need for a Revolutionary Party

*By Reihana Mohideen*

In one of the most successful recruiting advertisements that the DSP has had, the one in *Green Left Weekly*, we explain some of the essential reasons behind the need for a party in this way: You think this system is rotten? You think it should be changed? Then do something about it! By collectively joining with others, you are far more effective than on your own. Join the DSP!

These concepts seem simple enough. The reasoning is very straight forward and it's on the basis of this understanding that people generally join Resistance. It's with this level of political understanding that they take this first step.

But of course the answer to the question of why we need a revolutionary party is somewhat more complicated than this. The initial step is joining us on the basis of a certain elementary level of understanding of the issues and the need to organise. Then comes the process of becoming convinced of the need for a revolutionary party.

To talk about the revolutionary party, its theory and practice, is to talk about the ideas of the Russian Marxist, Vladimir Lenin, i.e., to talk about the theory and practice of Leninism.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lenin's ideas have been much maligned. The bourgeois media has had a field-day ridiculing Leninism.

The last few years since the collapse of Stalinism have been a period of "soul searching" for the left. In the light of the recent events, the DSP too, re-examined questions fundamental to its theory and practice, central to which is the question of the revolutionary party. So we went back and re-read and studied once more the ideas of Lenin. Instead of finding them wanting, we found the essential ideas still relevant, perhaps more than ever, to the situation we face today. At the 14th DSP National

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Conference in January of this year, we again reaffirmed the essential elements of our party-building strategy.

We think Lenin's chief political contribution was the creation of the Bolshevik party, the party of the Russian Revolution. This is his chief legacy for us in trying to make a revolution in Australia. The Russian Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, provide us with an invaluable example, both in theory and practice, of how to build a mass revolutionary workers' party that can lead the workers and their allies in taking power.

For Lenin, the party question was not an abstract academic question. It was inextricably tied to the question of bringing about fundamental social change, of making a revolution. The question of the party flowed from the recognition of the objective necessity of a workers' revolution. This is in fact a fairly straightforward proposition: You have to be committed to a fundamental revolutionary transformation of society. You have to understand the necessity for revolution. This is the basic starting point to understanding the need for a revolutionary party.

The reports and discussions at Resistance's 21st National Conference very much reaffirmed the necessity for the revolutionary transformation of society. The environmental crisis, the social holocaust in the Third World, the global capitalist economic crisis and the increasing poverty of the working people inside the imperialist countries — all these factors, analysed at the Resistance conference, continue to pose the need for a fundamental revolutionary transformation of society today.

So this understanding is our starting point. From this flows the organisational questions, the organisational forms, needed for achieving our goal.

## Goals & organisational forms

This then leads us to another important premise: the goal of an organisation determines the type of organisation needed. This seems a very obvious concept. But it's a vital concept that not everyone understands. This helps us to understand the nature, role, and limitations of other types of organisations.

Different goals lead to different types of organisations. A student union or a trade union, or a feminist or environmental organisation with more limited goals, can do with a more limited organisation of its members.

The ALP's goal is to make Australian capitalism more secure and prosperous. It seeks to do this through legislative reforms, and through winning a majority of seats in parliament and forming a government based on the existing state machine. It's a purely parliamentarist strategy, for which a parliamentarist party is needed. This of course breeds careerism. The ALP is full of political careerists after safe seats in parliament. Sometimes it's hard to say which comes first, an individual's desire for a



safe seat or the interests of the party as a whole.

The parliamentarist objective of the ALP leads to the wheeling and dealing, the numbers game, that characterises its internal life. The ALP is divided into permanent factions whose sole purpose is to provide power bases where the careerists line up the numbers to get and retain preselection for safe seats in parliament. Both left and right factions play this game almost full time. Policy gets ditched in the mad scramble for seats and positions. You promise anyone anything for short-term gain. So the “election promise” gets broken by left, right and centre. This is the norm of ALP functioning.

So program — your real aims and the strategy by which you seek to attain them — determines the sort of organisation you need.

## Developing working-class political consciousness

The Marxist theory of revolution, of the role of the working class being agents of revolution, cannot be spontaneously acquired by the working class in struggle. The working class needs a party, a particular type of working-class party, to develop this understanding of its historical interests and role. The revolutionary party, through its program, is the vehicle for introducing socialist theory, socialist consciousness, into the workers’ movement.

Lenin sets out this thesis in his essay *What Is To Be Done?* in a polemic against a current in the Russian socialist movement called the “Economists”. The Economists essentially argued that there was no need to consciously introduce socialist ideas into the working class; that through its struggles around everyday economic questions of wages etc., that is, around the types of questions taken up by the trade unions, the working class would spontaneously attain a socialist consciousness.

Lenin put forward a different proposition. He argued:

The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, that is the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employer and strive to compel the government to pass necessary legislation etc.

... the spontaneous working class movement is trade unionism and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie.

... the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology.

Lenin was not saying that unions and union struggles are unimportant. Far from it. But he was arguing that they are limited, and don’t fundamentally challenge bourgeois ideology and bourgeois rule. On their own they cannot bring about revolutionary change. That’s because, on their own, they are aimed at improving the conditions of

the workers under the capitalist system, rather than abolishing the system. They are premised on the continued existence of capitalist exploitation of wage labour, and simply seek a better price and better conditions of work for wage labour.

The understanding that the real interests of the working class can only be attained through the abolition of wage slavery, through the replacement of capitalism with socialism, requires a theoretical understanding of the history and essential nature of capitalism. This understanding, which Marx and Engels were the first to develop, required extensive theoretical knowledge. The theory of scientific socialism grew out of the whole evolution of human society and was developed by a (tiny) part of the bourgeois intelligentsia, which broke from its class origins and aligned itself with the working-class movement. Marxism was a synthesis of and developed out of the ideas of German philosophy, English political economy and French radical social theory. As the *Communist Manifesto* observes:

...a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.

So, historically, the theory of scientific socialism, of proletarian revolution arose outside the labour movement. It was developed by a small group of ruling class ideologists who had broken with their class and joined the movement of the working class, the revolutionary class. These revolutionary intellectuals, first in the Communist League (1847-52), then in the First International (1864-76), linked up with militant workers' organisations and provided them with a theoretical explanation of the workers' movement and a scientific program for achieving socialism.

In nearly every case, revolutionary socialist organisations have been founded by radicalised intellectuals, particularly students, coming from middle-class backgrounds, who have broken with their class origins and, as a result of theoretical study, have been won to a revolutionary working-class perspective.

So socialist ideas have to be introduced to the working class from outside of the spontaneous day-to-day economic struggles between workers and employers. For such a political education a revolutionary party, an organisation that unites those who understand and seek to apply the theory of scientific socialism, is necessary.

Then Lenin goes on to outline what he means by this political education. He asks, rhetorically, what should political education consist of?

Agitation must be conducted with regard to every concrete example of this

oppression...as *this* oppression affects the most diverse classes of society, inasmuch as it manifests itself in the most varied spheres of life and activity — vocational, civic, personal, family, religious, scientific, etc., etc.

So the working class must learn to champion the struggles against all forms of oppression as it affects all sections of society, in the most varied spheres of life and activity — the personal, political, scientific, religious, etc. Working-class political education should consist of education on all social questions.

The Economists argued that, yes, we need to develop political consciousness — but that the “political struggle of the working class is merely the most developed, wide and effective form of economic struggle”, and that “the economic struggle is the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into active political struggle”.

Is this true, Lenin asks, and replies:

It is entirely untrue. *Any and every* manifestation of police tyranny and autocratic outrage, not only in connection with the economic struggle, is not one whit less “widely applicable” [as a means of drawing the masses into political activity].

Then he goes on to describe some of these issues: Police corruption, taxes, religious persecution, mistreatment of soldiers, treatment of students and intellectuals and so on. Lenin summarises his view on this question:

Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter *what class* is affected — unless they are trained, moreover, to respond from a Social-Democratic [i.e., Marxist] point of view and no other.

Lenin continued that this approach would “clarify for all the world the historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat”. It is only in this way, with this level of political consciousness that the working class can carry out its historic role of being the class that brings about revolutionary social change, which heralds a new society.

To develop the working-class struggle in this way, a revolutionary party is necessary. Lenin and the Bolsheviks argued for and built a party along these lines — and that party made the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Today it’s with this perspective that Resistance and the DSP campaign around questions of ecology, women’s rights, students’ rights, blacks’ rights, peace, gay rights, etc., etc. It’s this perspective that has guided us through at each potential disaster point of economism.

The economic view is still around in sections of the left today. The International Socialist Organisation, for example, accuse us of championing “petty-bourgeois” causes — the environment, women’s liberation, etc. — as if these questions don’t affect the

working class. It's true that most of the leading activists in these movements are middle-class professionals. However, that doesn't mean that the issues are of concern only to the petty-bourgeoisie. The point is to bring a working-class perspective, a revolutionary socialist perspective into these movements, and try to win these movements to such a perspective. This is our aim.

To recap Lenin's thesis so far: the theory of scientific socialism was developed by the bourgeois ideologists who had broken with their class on the basis of a study of the whole evolution of human society and, most particularly, the irreconcilable antagonism between the two main classes of modern society — the capitalists and the class of wage workers. The working class cannot acquire a scientific understanding of its class interests and historical role through its day-to-day struggles with individual employers. It cannot acquire a revolutionary consciousness "spontaneously" on its own. A revolutionary party, which consists of revolutionary intellectuals and class-conscious workers, is necessary to raise the political consciousness of the workers. To develop such a consciousness, the working class must be taught to respond to all social questions. Only such an education can prepare it for its historic task, as outlined by Marx, to lead society as a whole towards a new social order.

## Marx, Engels & Lenin on the party

The founders of scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, unveiled for us the actuality of revolution, both in terms of the objective and subjective factors, and arrived at the conclusion that a working-class party was necessary to bring about revolutionary change.

After the defeat of the bourgeois revolutions of 1848, when Marx and Engels saw the first stirrings of the working class in Europe, they drew the following conclusion:

Instead of once again stooping to serve as the applauding chorus of the bourgeois democrats, the workers, and above all the League [i.e., the Communist League] must exert themselves to establish an independent, secret and public organisation of the workers party alongside of the "official" democrats.

Here Marx and Engels begin to talk of a definite party point of view; of a party with a program, a clear independent class position. Through different phases they return to this idea. At the Hague Congress of the First International in 1872, their resolution on rules states: "This constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social revolution and of its ultimate end, the abolition of classes."

A historical event, which was very important in shaping Lenin's later views on the party question, was the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871. The Paris Commune was the first great working-class experiment, where the embryonic working class of

Paris seized power for 72 days. It ended in defeat and the bloody massacre of the workers at the hands of reaction.

Marx, Engels and the generation of Marxists after them (i.e., Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, etc.) studied this event very carefully. Following the 1848 revolutions Marx had already drawn the conclusion that the working class could not simply seize the existing bourgeois state apparatus and use it to advance its interests, that in order to abolish capitalism the working class had to “smash” the bourgeois state machine and replace it with a workers’ state. But neither he nor Engels had a clear idea of what sort of state the workers needed to make a revolution. The experience of the Paris Commune provided the answer. From it Marx drew the conclusion that the workers needed a state without a standing army and police, a state made up of the armed workers themselves, in which all officials were elected and recallable by their electors, and in which all officials were paid no more than the average wage of a skilled worker.

But another lesson was drawn by revolutionaries after Marx. Trotsky, in his 1921 article “Lessons of the Commune” describes it this way:

The workers’ party — the real one — is not a machine for parliamentary manoeuvres; it is the accumulated and organised experience of the proletariat. It is only with the aid of the party, which rests upon the whole history of its past, which foresees theoretically the path of development, all its stages, and which extracts from it the necessary formula of action, that the proletariat frees itself from the need of always recommencing its history: its hesitations, its lack of decision, its mistakes...

The proletariat of Paris did not have such a party...

If the centralised party of revolutionary action had been found at the head of the proletariat of France in September 1870, the whole history of France and with it the whole history of humanity would have taken another direction.

That is, a central conclusion drawn from the *defeat* of the Paris Commune was the need for a centralised party of revolutionary action. This was the lesson, drawn in hindsight, about what sort of party was needed. Note the leap in understanding; from “The constitution of the working class into a political party”, as Marx and Engels concluded, to “A centralised party of revolutionary action”, as Trotsky describes it.

But we owe this not to Trotsky (who initially opposed such a conception of the party), but to Lenin. It was Lenin’s major achievement and contribution. This phrase of Trotsky’s describes the other great lesson Lenin drew for us, i.e., on how the workers’ party should function and who should be in it. No one paid more attention to such questions than Lenin.

Here is Lenin’s conclusion on the composition of the party:

The organisation of the revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who

make revolutionary activity their profession...In view of this common characteristic of the members of such an organisation, all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals, not to speak of distinctions of trade and profession, in both categories — must be effaced.

That is, revolutionary activity must be your profession, a lifelong task. This means commitment and dedication. A party is nothing without this. You give it your all, not dabble in it halfheartedly.

Marx and Engels, before Lenin, understood certain needs of party organisation. They argued against the anarchists such as Bakunin that a party can't be a microcosm of the future society. They argued for the need for elected leadership bodies and full-time paid functionaries. Referring to a certain period of crisis in the English trade unions which were related to questions of organisation they stated:

The English workers, in the first period of existence of their unions, considered it an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing unions; not only were all questions decided by the vote of all the members, but all official duties were fulfilled by all members in turn. A long period of historical experience was required for workers to realize the absurdity of such a conception of democracy and to make them understand the necessity for representative institutions, on the one hand, and full-time officials on the other.

Only after a number of cases of financial bankruptcy of trade union treasuries occurred did the workers realize that the rates of contributions and benefits cannot be decided merely by a democratic vote, but that this requires also the advice of insurance experts.

The need for formal rules (to replace small circles and the clique spirit), were the sorts of organisational questions clarified by Marx and Engels. But Lenin raised party organisation to a different level. He was clearer on this question than Marx and Engels. He pointed out that "the character of any organisation is naturally inevitably determined by the content of its activity". From this it follows that only those who consciously support the revolutionary program and actively carry it out should, and can be, members. That is, the revolutionary workers' party must be a party of committed, conscious revolutionary activists.

## Membership selection

This is a simple proposition — but a controversial one, because it involves the selection of our members; selection before and after people join, because after they join, there are ongoing expectations of membership.

The selection of members is also related to the nature of the struggle for socialism

and the character of the working class itself. The socialist revolution is the most conscious revolution in history, carried out by the lowest social class. But this social class is very heterogeneous in its experiences and therefore level of political understanding. So the revolutionary party cannot consist of all members of this class — but only the class conscious members of the working class. As Lenin explained: “Precisely because there are differences in degree of consciousness and degree of activity, a distinction must be made in degree of proximity to the party.”

Again, this is Lenin’s unique and very important contribution to the party question. Engels, by contrast, underestimated this. At the end of his life, writing about the socialist parties of Europe he stated: “The simple feeling of solidarity based on the understanding of the identity of class position suffices to create and hold together one and the same great party of the proletariat among the workers of all countries and tongues.”

So Engels glosses over this question, i.e., a simple feeling of class solidarity is enough to qualify someone to be a member of the socialist party. This was how the socialist parties in Europe were organised — as inclusive of everyone who regarded themselves as a socialist. It led to very large parties, but parties made up largely of passive memberships with a very limited understanding of Marxist politics — parties which were extremely susceptible to bureaucratic manipulation by opportunist parliamentary and trade union leaders. When faced with revolutionary situations, as in 1918, such parties proved not only incapable of leading the working class in revolutionary action, but became the biggest single obstacle to such action.

So what do we expect of our members? What are the important criteria in this selection process?

Firstly, we demand that members accept the party’s revolutionary program. Those who reject the Marxist program are entitled to their views but not to membership of our party. The party is a voluntary formation created to implement a program that can guide the workers and their allies in a struggle to take power, abolish capitalism and create a classless, socialist society. Only those who accept that program are therefore entitled to admission into the party’s ranks.

Secondly, we demand seriousness about our revolutionary politics. If we’re calling for revolutionary change, we shouldn’t do this light-mindedly. Revolutionary change which involves masses of people in action, on the streets, in their workplaces, taking on the state power of the capitalist class. This is a very serious business. So we don’t approach it light-mindedly. It shouldn’t be a pose. We’ve got to train our members that this in no sense is a pose to flatter our egos. We cannot be like many of the anarchists, who love to say “I am an anarchist” because then you have really rejected

traditional society, and it sounds good at the pub on Saturday night. We don't want to go around posing like that, saying we are revolutionaries, unless we take the whole business seriously. Revolutionary politics is not a game. It demands a serious commitment.

This commitment to the cause of revolutionary social transformation, and the understanding of the need for a party, gets translated into a particular attitude towards the party, i.e., building it becomes a lifetime vocation and task. It becomes a central purpose in life and in that way a sense of immense personal satisfaction.

Because of what the party represents to committed activists, it is something they are loyal to. They practice a "party patriotism" if you like.

For us, loyalty is a primary condition of membership. But this doesn't mean that comrades are uncritical about the party, or that they have to be loyal to any party position. Loyalty to the party is not a "blind loyalty" — like the bourgeois sense of unquestioning loyalty to "your" country, i.e., to the policies of the rulers of your country. Members of a revolutionary party are loyal to the revolutionary program of the party and to its organisational expression, that is, to the party. They defend the party against its enemies. They don't have divided loyalties — building the party is their primary and fundamental concern and commitment.

There's nothing harsh or outlandish about this view of loyalty. In fact, loyalty to the party is the best experience you can have, because if you don't act in this way you hinder your full development and integration into the party — and then cynicism is not far off.

The third element of membership requirement is activism. Obviously this is necessary. We don't just theorise about our ideas — we try to carry them out, implement them, test them out through acting on them. The test of your ideas is life itself.

How active do our members have to be? Our constitution says to the best of your ability. That can vary depending on the circumstances. There can't be a single model here. Activism is affected by people's personal situation, and also their level of political understanding, of political consciousness. But to us the primary reason for activism — is that you can only understand the world by trying to change it. And understanding itself is an active process.

If we are not a party of conscious revolutionists, we cannot defend the party's program — a revolutionary program. We can't be a conscious party unless we raise the political class consciousness of our members. As I have described earlier, Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* tells us exactly how to do that — that is the process of responding to all cases of oppression, no matter which class or section of society, is effected. Through that process, we develop political class consciousness.



## Democracy

The level of consciousness, commitment and activism of the membership of a revolutionary party gives rise to a unique form of democratic functioning in such a party. Lenin understood this question, this unique aspect of democracy in a revolutionary party very clearly. In *What Is To Be Done?* he wrote:

Given these qualities [of membership — the strictest selection of members and the training of professional revolutionaries] something even more than democratism would be guaranteed to us, namely, complete, comradely mutual confidence amongst revolutionaries.

This “mutual confidence amongst revolutionaries” (you trust a comrade with your life) is very important to the way we function. It’s unique — it can’t necessarily be quantified in the usual measures of democracy. It’s not something that can be set down in the formal rules of party organisation. But without it, all our formal rules would mean very little.

On the basis of this mutual trust and confidence in each other, the party does have formal rules of functioning. For example, we take votes to decide what we’re going to do as a collective body. The majority, i.e., 50% plus one, decides. The Greens say this is undemocratic. But we can vote in such a way, because we set clear political criteria for membership. We select our members on the basis of agreement with a clear, coherent political program. The Greens don’t.

At the moment, the Greens don’t have a clearly defined program. Well, that’s not entirely true: they’re very clear about two things — that their rather vaguely defined goals can be achieved through parliament, and that they are opposed to including revolutionary socialists in their ranks. But within that framework, they’re “all-inclusive”. They compensate for their political heterogeneity by setting different majorities, 66 or 75%, which is hardly democratic since a minority can veto all decisions.

The Greens also talk a lot about consensus. The truth of the matter is that our way of selecting our members encourages consensus. Decisions arrived at by consensus are far more common in our party than in the Greens. We try to arrive at a consensus because we vote, because we don’t put people in a minority lightly in our party.

We vote not just to determine people’s opinions, but to act. We vote to take action and when we act we want everyone to implement our decisions, so we try to reach the broadest level of agreement before we vote. We do it better if we all agree. So we seldom have divided votes.

There is a type of fake consensus practiced in sections of the Green movement, i.e., a tendency to ostracise people for “blocking” consensus. This is a way of forcing unity in action, a type of intellectual terrorism, if you like. We are 100% opposed to that. It is

profoundly undemocratic and stifles freedom of thought. If you don't agree it's your right and responsibility to say so, to discuss, clarify, influence and take a vote. If not convinced, people should maintain their opinions, but await the test of life. In the meantime pitch in, test out the majority line in practice and see if it's correct or needs changing.

## Internal discussion

Voting in our party is preceded by discussion. A very extensive internal discussion takes place through bulletins, newspapers, information sheets, frequent meetings and conferences.

Members also have the right to form factions, to group together around a clearly defined set of objectives to change the policy, direction, or even the leadership of the party.

But the party is not a discussion club. We discuss, vote, act — discuss, vote, act again — there is a cycle to our work in this way.

In order to act in a united way, we have to have centralised direction of the implementation of decisions, that is, leadership bodies. We also subscribe to the principle of elected leadership bodies. We elect our leadership at all levels. An essential element of our election principles is the right of recall of elected leadership bodies. It's because our leadership bodies are elected that they have the authority to take decisions for the whole membership.

This body of organisational principles is often described as “democratic centralism”. This term was first adopted by the 1906 unity congress between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Stockholm. The term, however, is much maligned by the bureaucratic practices of Stalinism. But we need to go beyond terminology to the principles of democratic centralism.

## 'Vanguard party'

Lenin used the term “vanguard party” to describe the type of party he was forging, i.e., a party which brought together the most conscious elements of the working class.

Like the term “democratic centralism”, the term “vanguard party” draws a lot of scorn these days. While, generally speaking, it is those who are moving to the right who are the most scornful about the idea of the vanguard party, we also know through our own experiences that the Western left in particular is dotted with self-proclaimed vanguard party formations. Lenin, aware of this danger, cautioned against “self-proclaimed vanguards”. In *What Is To Be Done?* he stated:

It is not enough to call ourselves the vanguard; the advanced contingent; we must act

in such a way that all the other contingents recognize and are obliged to admit that we are marching in the vanguard...A revolutionary party is worthy of its name only when it guides in deed the movement of a revolutionary class.

So the leading role, the vanguard role must be won in action. It cannot simply be self-proclaimed.

Note that Lenin says that a “revolutionary party is worthy of its name only when it guides in deed the movement of a revolutionary class”. That is, until a party actually leads the working class in revolutionary action it cannot really consider itself the “vanguard” of the class. By this criteria, the Bolshevik party only really became the vanguard party of the Russian working class in 1917. Before then it was an organisation that sought to become the vanguard party, that sought to become the revolutionary leadership of the working class.

But how do revolutionaries win the leadership of the working class? After all, Marx concluded that the ruling ideas of every society are the ideas of the ruling class; that through its control of the material means of production, the ruling class dominates the production and dissemination of ideas. How then can the working class be won to the perspective of making a revolution?

Marx was correct in his analysis regarding the ideological hegemony of the ruling class. The implications of this are that the working class can only really free itself from bourgeois ideas and prejudices after it has made a socialist revolution, after it has taken control of the means of production, that is, after it has made *itself* the ruling class.

But then, don't we face an insoluble dilemma? The working class can only fully free itself from bourgeois ideology after it has made a revolution but, on the other hand, in order to make revolution, it must develop an anti-capitalist, revolutionary consciousness.

The first thing to recognise is that while the *ruling* ideas of any society are the ideas of its ruling class, this does not mean they are the only ideas within that society. Revolutionary ideas can still exist. In “normal” times, revolutionary ideas, that is, the ideas of Marxism, will be held only by a minority, often a very small minority within the working class. However, as the contradictions of the social order become sharper, as the conflict between the ruling class and the working class becomes more intense, more and more workers will be impelled to take action to defend their interests against the attacks of the ruling class. The ideas of the ruling class will begin to conflict with the actual life experiences of more and more workers. Through mass struggles to defend their existing conditions or to win even modest improvements in them, workers can begin to break free of the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class.

In the context of a sharp and deep-going social crisis such as, for example, occurred in Russia in 1917, when the masses mobilised in their millions to fight for “peace,

bread, and land”, the conditions were created for a *mass* break with bourgeois ideological hegemony. The conditions existed for a fusion between the mass movement and the initially relatively small organisation of professional revolutionaries, i.e., for the creation of a mass revolutionary party that could lead the working class in a struggle for power.

But such a fusion could not be realised spontaneously. It required coherent, comprehensive political activity — propaganda, agitation and organisation — on the part of the revolutionary organisation, on the part of the party. It required the existence and conscious intervention in these mass struggles of a revolutionary nucleus of well-trained, experienced and tested propagandists, agitators and organisers.

Such a revolutionary nucleus could not be improvised and come into being overnight. Its creation required many years of preparatory work. In Russia, that preparatory work had been done, by Lenin and the Bolsheviks from 1903.

That’s one of the most fundamental lessons that we have to draw from the experience of the Russian Revolution: You have to build that sort of revolutionary party nucleus today, you can’t wait for a revolutionary crisis to begin to build it.

## Non-partyism

Do we need the type of party that Lenin advocated, in this period, in a non-revolutionary period?

Lenin, too, had to look at this question. After the defeat of the 1905 revolution, when there was reaction and the working class was quiescent, Lenin persisted against those who argued that there wasn’t a need for a party in a period like this, against those who said, later on when the struggle warms up, perhaps, but not now. This current in the Russian socialist movement was known as the “liquidationists”.

In an essay, “The Liquidation of Liquidationism”, Lenin wrote:

Now, in this time of stagnation, reaction and disintegration, we must learn to “speak German”, i.e., to work slowly (there is nothing else for it, until things revive), systematically, steadily, advancing step by step, winning inch by inch. Whoever finds this work tedious, whoever does not understand the need for preserving and developing the revolutionary principles of Social-Democratic tactics *in this phase too, on this bend of the road*, is taking the name of Marxist in vain.

Lenin pointed out that the fact that we seem so far from a working-class revolution leads to non-class popular movements and struggle, i.e., demands to reform or improve capitalism. The non-party organisations are essential — but the very fact that they’re struggling around immediate demands often put off consideration of any more general critique and attack on the ills of society as a whole. In this context, non-alignment, “independence” or “non-partyism”, as Lenin described it, comes to the fore — becomes

the popular stance.

Well, the bourgeoisie doesn't care too much about this because they know that non-alignment means that people are saying they just want to improve bourgeois society, "perfect it" rather than abolish it.

Lenin points out that society is divided into classes and the struggle between classes becomes a political struggle and that the most comprehensive form of this political struggle is the struggle between political parties. These are facts, historical facts, that Lenin, writing in 1902-03, is clear about and that nothing in subsequent history has disproved.

In a later period, when debating the liquidationists, he becomes more explicit about this point. He states:

Those who consciously or unconsciously stand for the bourgeois system cannot help feeling attracted by the idea of non-partisanship...The non-party principle means indifference to the struggle of parties. But this indifference is not equivalent to neutrality, to abstention from the struggle...

Indifference is tacit support of the strong, of those who rule...

The non-party principle in bourgeois society, is merely a hypocritical, disguised, passive expression of adherence to the party of the well-fed; of the rulers, of the exploited.

The non-party idea is a bourgeois idea. The party idea is a socialist idea.

This is a rather simple thesis of why the working class needs a political party. It explains too why the outcome of this whole period, of these social movements is a rash of independent candidates today. They're really an expression of this so-called non-partisanship.

Many of these people accept that there should be political action, though they limit it to the parliamentary arena. Well there's politics and politics. But what they argue is that such political action shouldn't be a party struggle, and that in the end the existing rulers should continue to rule.

Some of them are even quite candid about this — all they aspire to do is "hold the balance of power" in parliament. Of course, you can only do that if there is a difference between the major parliamentary parties, and on all the fundamentals there is no difference between Labor and Liberal. So a goal of "holding the balance power" in parliament, really amounts to accepting that power will remain in the hands of the capitalist class and its parties. The only "power" you'll have in this context is the ability to bargain for a few minor reforms to their legislative measures.

Genuine independent political action, that is, political action that's independent of the capitalist two-party game requires building a party that intervenes in and seeks to lead extra-parliamentary struggles, that mobilises the power of masses of people

against the institutions of capitalist power.

## The struggle against labour opportunism

Lenin's ideas were developed and the Bolshevik party was built through active intervention in the struggles of the masses, in responding to the big events of the period.

A turning point for the Marxist movement was the capitulation of the big socialist parties of Europe to the war drive of the imperialist rulers. With the exception of the Bolsheviks, nearly all the other parties in the Second (Socialist) International supported their "own" imperialist governments' war against other countries. This caused a major split in the Second International. This degree of betrayal of the working-class movement by his one-time comrades deeply shocked Lenin. He at first refused to believe newspaper stories regarding the German socialist parliamentary deputies voting in favor of war credits. He thought it was malicious bourgeois propaganda. Subsequently, Lenin tried to understand the social and political reasons for this betrayal.

"Is there any connection between imperialism and the monstrous and disgusting victory opportunism...has gained over the labour movement in Europe?", Lenin asked in his article "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism". Lenin answered: yes, a section of the working class has been bribed by the monopolies' super profits and "converted into *watchdogs* of capitalism and *corruptors* of the labour movement".

"A '*bourgeois labour party*'", he stated, "*is inevitable* and typical in *all* imperialist countries".

Even before World War I, in 1913, this was how Lenin described the ALP — as a liberal bourgeois party. "The leaders of the Australian Labor Party", Lenin noted, "are trade union officials, everywhere the most moderate and 'capital-serving' element, and in Australia, altogether peaceable, purely liberal".

In his article on "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism", Lenin concluded:

The only Marxist line in the world labour movement is to explain to the masses the inevitability and necessity of breaking with opportunism, to educate them for revolution by waging a relentless struggle against opportunism, to utilise the experience of the war to expose...the utter vileness of national-liberal labour politics.

To do this, to break the working-class movement from opportunism in the imperialist countries, a revolutionary party was necessary. The experience of the war and the Russian Revolution confirmed this.

Where, as in Russia, the revolutionary Marxists (the Bolsheviks) had waged a relentless fight against opportunism in the workers' movement, including organisationally breaking with the opportunist labour leaders (the Mensheviks), they

were able to defeat the influence of these leaders within the workers' movement and win it to a revolutionary course of action.

By contrast, even where, as in Germany, revolutionary Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had waged an ideological struggle against opportunism, but did not form a party, or even an organised faction, separate from the opportunists until a revolutionary crisis had broken out in Germany, they were unable to break the opportunists' political hold over the working class.



In conclusion, the ideas of Lenin, of Leninism, apply in general. It's the principles, the method, that we must understand. We absorb Lenin's method, not looking for a strict recipe from an earlier period, a different country. In fact, we must each do much more to apply this method to Australian conditions.

Let me end by reading from Lenin's book *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, a summary of the Bolsheviks' split with the Mensheviks over questions of party organisation:

In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organisation. Disunited by the rule of anarchic competition in the bourgeois world, ground down by forced labour for capital, constantly thrust back to the "lower depths" of utter destitution, savagery, and degeneration, the proletariat can, and inevitably will, become an invincible force only through its ideological unification on the principles of Marxism being reinforced by the material unity of organisation, which welds millions of toilers into an army of the working class. Neither the senile rule of the Russian autocracy nor the senescent rule of international capital will be able to withstand this army. It will more and more firmly close its ranks, in spite of all zigzags and backward steps, in spite of the opportunist phrase-mongering of the Girondists\* of present-day Social-Democracy, in spite of the self-satisfied exaltation of the retrograde circle spirit, and in spite of the tinsel and fuss of *intellectualist* anarchism.

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\* The *Girondists* were the political representatives of the big bourgeoisie in the Great French Revolution (1789-94). They sought a reformist compromise with feudal absolutism, in contrast to the Jacobins, the political representatives of the radical petty bourgeoisie, who stood for the radical overthrow of the monarchy and feudalism. Lenin called the opportunist trend in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (i.e., the Mensheviks) the "socialist Gironde" and the revolutionary Social Democrats (i.e., the Bolsheviks) — proletarian Jacobins.

Well, this is rather firm stuff. But we face similar problems today. We are faced with this intellectualism, cynicism, regarding organisation — regarding the party question.

Throughout the long years before 1917, including during the years of deep reaction after the crushing of the 1905 revolution and during World War I, Lenin stressed the need to continue to build the party, to return to the attack time and time again. Lenin's ideas, Leninism, is not popular, not fashionable among the “trendy” left today, because it continually poses the need for revolution. It's not for coffee-shop dilettantes. It demands commitment and dedication.

The Communist International under Lenin popularised a phrase about the revolutionary party. They called it a “labour school of revolutionary Marxism”. It's only through the conscious intervention of the party in society, through conscious party activity, that we learn about the thinking of the people, the level of consciousness of the working class, the nature of the state, bourgeois ideology, bourgeois rule and how to combat it. It's only through party activity, through building a party, that we learn the problems of how to mobilise, how to organise, how to educate, and in the process to educate ourselves.

This labour school of revolutionary Marxism should be a labour of love, if you like. We should approach it with dedication, commitment, with a lot of passion.

Our collective action, our scientific discussion, the sense of human solidarity that we get from building the party together and building Resistance, is one of the most satisfying and rewarding things that we can do with our lives. ■



# Building a Revolutionary Party: Our Concepts & Methods

*By John Percy*

The reasons *why* we need a revolutionary party, and Lenin's outstanding contributions on this question, were thoroughly covered by Reihana's talk yesterday (see p. 7 of this edition). The aim of this talk is to look at the sort of party we're building and some of the basic concepts and methods of our party-building approach.

## Revolutionary leadership

Reihana [Mohideen] pointed out that a mass revolutionary party is required to provide leadership to the working class and its allies in their struggle for socialism. The entire experience of the international working-class movement demonstrates that without the leadership of a mass revolutionary party the workers and their allies won't be able to win a lasting victory over their capitalist oppressors.

That's the essence of what we want to address today. How to lead, how to lead the working class, and all the oppressed, in the struggle for socialism.

All of us here have that responsibility thrust on us, as soon as we join Resistance or the DSP, as soon as we raise ourselves onto that higher level of consciousness that recognises the need for a revolutionary organisation. We are all leaders, and have to act that way.

And specifically in this discussion, I want to address how to lead the party and Resistance themselves. So this talk is about *leadership*, which is the essence of the party question.

In a speech to a conference in Havana in the 1980s, entitled "May Deep Feelings of Solidarity Shine Forth Here Once Again", Jesus Montane Oropesa, a member of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee, asked: Who will be leaders in the

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coming struggles? He answers:

...those who learn from others and think for themselves will lead the struggle. Those who do not lack determination and courage will deserve to be in the vanguard.

Those who demonstrate the ability to judge situations, mobilize the people, win them over, advance along the path of unity, select the most effective methods of struggle for every stage and carry out a correct strategy by means of equally correct tactical measures will deserve to be leaders.

In the party and in Resistance today, we've put up front a key aspect of leadership: helping *others* to lead, training others.

We've stated that we're an ambitious party. It's also OK to be ambitious as an individual, but the best way to express that ambition in Resistance and the DSP is in a collective framework, with a team spirit, helping others to lead, training others to do their best, taking pleasure and pride in the successes and victories of other comrades and the organisation as a whole.

Isaac Deutscher in his great biography of Leon Trotsky commented on Trotsky's attitude on this: "It was not that he deprecated all personal ambition — desire for distinction was often a stimulus to effort and achievement. But 'the revolutionary begins where personal ambition is fully and wholly subordinated to the service of a great idea'."

We're a *collective* unit, and we adopt a *team* approach. And it's comradeship, not friendship that binds us together.

We're building a party of collectivists, not individualists. We are building a party of people who get satisfaction from the performance of the whole team, of the whole party. We're building a party of leaders who want to help other people become leaders. We don't want to shine at the expense of other people looking bad.

*All* comrades can play a leading role in some way in our movement. And by accepting that leading role, by aggressively taking up that leadership role, you develop yourselves.

We all have to lead by *example*. Leaders, at all levels, are expected to be exemplary in their unswerving loyalty to the party, and to set an example for others in their commitment to building the party.

Well, there are a few things that we can clearly see that leadership in our movement is not. It's not *posing* as a leader, not being *arrogant* about being a leader. It's not a question of apparatchiks entrenched in positions issuing orders from on high as the whim takes them. It's not ego-tripping. We discussed yesterday that it's not a question of proclaiming yourself the vanguard, and it's not a question of proclaiming yourself a leader. In a speech he gave in 1967 Fidel Castro pointed out that: "Anyone can have

‘Eagle’ for a last name without having a single feather on his back. In the same way, there are people who call themselves communists without having a communist hair on their head.”

Leadership, both within the party and within the working class, is something that has to be *earned*.

## Sources

Well, what are the *sources* of our organisational concepts and methods, and where can we get lessons from?

There aren’t many easy cookbooks, or manuals. There *is* experience, and lots of writings and books that we can study — writings by Lenin, Trotsky, Cannon, the Cubans, and, of course, our own experience now, which stretches over 25 years. And that’s very extensive, very thorough now. And it relates to our specific conditions. We do need it written down more completely, the experience of the party, and the experience of Resistance itself.

So what I’m going to outline in this talk are some of the general concepts involved in the question of leadership, and building a revolutionary party. Most of them apply equally to the tasks of building Resistance.

Well, we’ve got positive examples from history. But there are also lots of negative examples, and they’re also worth studying — the experiences of Stalinism, of Social Democracy, of the “revolutionary” sects, of the anarchists.

And there’s no one document or article with all this experience drawn together. It’s mainly the historical experiences that contain the lessons, the norms, the principles. There’s not yet been a satisfactory attempt to put it all down in one spot.

In 1977, at our 5th National Conference, the party did adopt a resolution on its organisational principles. In the mid-1980s we felt that this resolution was inadequate in summing up our organisational concepts and norms. The National Executive of the party commissioned the drafting of a new resolution on this topic. However, we weren’t completely happy with it, so we did not submit it for adoption by the party. At the same time, we did not believe it would serve the party’s needs to retain the resolution adopted in 1977 as a statement of our organisational principles. So at the 11th National Conference in January 1986, the party formally rescinded the 1977 resolution, and we adopted a new party constitution that codified some of our organisational norms that we set out in the 1977 resolution, for example, on the rights and obligations of factions within the party.

The December 1982 issue of our magazine *Socialist Worker*, contains three reports on party-building by Jim Percy, and that’s a mine of information and principles that

help on this question. There are the experiences of the US SWP, and many of the writings of James P. Cannon of course — *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, *The History of American Trotskyism*, *Letters From Prison* and many others. But they apply often to specific US conditions, although there are a lot of very useful generalisations, and sometimes there are some things that don't really apply, or might be a bit distorted. And, of course, there are the writings of Lenin and the whole rich experiences of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and although they occurred in quite different circumstances to our situation in Australia today, they are still valid and the fundamental source of our organisational principles.

### Comintern Theses

The Communist International, which was set up after the victory of the Russian Revolution, did adopt some theses on this question at its 3rd Congress in July 1921, titled “The Organisational Structure of the Communist Parties, the Methods and Content of Their Work”. It's reprinted in the book, *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*.

This document was adopted in the context of firming up some of the new parties that had been won over to communism, some of the parties that had formerly been Social-Democratic parties or parties that had split from Social-Democratic parties, and so it was specifically directed at combating some of the old Social-Democratic methods of work and organisation.

There are things in it that are not applicable today, of course. But there are some useful points we can learn from.

It begins with a preamble of five general principles:

1. The organisation of the party must correspond to the conditions and the purpose of its activity. At every stage of the revolutionary class struggle and in the subsequent period of transition to socialism — the first step in the development of a communist society — the Communist Party must be the vanguard, the most advanced section of the proletariat.

2. There is no absolute form of organisation which is correct for all Communist parties at all times. The conditions of the proletarian class struggle are constantly changing, and so the proletarian vanguard has always to be looking for effective forms of organisation. Equally, each party must develop its own special forms of organisation to meet the particular historically-determined conditions within the country.

The document also points out that there are definite limits to national variations.

3. In the coming period the centrally important task for all parties is the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the seizure of power.

Accordingly, *all the organisational work* of the Communist parties in the capitalist countries must be directed towards establishing organisations which can guarantee the victory of the proletarian revolution over the ruling classes.

That was still in the period of revolutionary upsurge that followed World War I, and there were prospects for revolution still in countries such as Germany.

4. *Leadership* is a necessary condition of any political action and is a vital factor in the present most important struggle in world history...

The party itself must have good leadership if it is to lead well.

5. To lead the revolutionary class struggle, the Communist Party and its leading bodies must possess great fighting power and at the same time the ability to adapt to the changing conditions of struggle. Successful leadership presupposes, moreover, *the closest contact with the proletarian masses*. Unless such contact is established the leaders will not *lead* the masses but, at best, only follow them.

As an aside on this: often the opportunists urge this contact with the masses; some of the trade union officials today urge this, but *not* for the purpose of leading them, but merely tailing behind them, following them, and that becomes an excuse for dropping any socialist or left principles.

## Democratic centralism

The preamble concludes that “The Communist Party organisations are to achieve organic contact with the masses by practising democratic centralism”.

And Section II is on that. I’ll just pick out some relevant theses and points.

The theses point out that democratic centralism means a synthesis, a fusion, of centralism and democracy.

Centralisation in the Communist Party does not mean formal, mechanical centralisation, but the *centralisation of Communist activity*, i.e., the creation of a leadership that is strong and effective and at the same time flexible.

The document reminds us that it’s not centralisation of power in the hands of a bureaucracy, allowing it to dominate the other members of the party, or the revolutionary masses outside the party, but the centralisation of party activity. United action, which is the purpose of having a party in the first place, requires centralised direction, i.e., leadership. A strong and effective leadership, however, can only be developed through party democracy. Only a leadership that has the confidence of the membership can provide effective centralised direction.

## A party of activists

Section III of the theses stresses the communist obligation to carry out the political

work decided on by the party. “8. The Communist Party must be a *labour school of revolutionary Marxism*”, it states, i.e., members must be *activists*.

It’s hammered again in the next thesis: “9...*all members should at all times participate in the day-to-day work of the Party*”. Comrades will recall from yesterday this was one of the issues at the heart of the Bolshevik/Menshevik split at the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903.

It’s repeated in thesis 10. Members should give all their time and energy to party work, i.e., effectively become professional revolutionaries. “But the most important condition of membership is that members participate on a day-to-day basis in the work of the party.”

The next five theses generally relate to the reorganisation of the former Social-Democratic parties — how to structure them, setting up cells etc., setting up fractions (it actually also uses the phrase “working groups”).

Thesis 17 is interesting. It’s a specific area we should be implementing more today.

17. One of the duties of the Communist organisation is to make reports. This applies to all organisations and organs of the party and to its individual members. Regular general reports must be made at frequent intervals and special reports when specific party tasks have been carried out. It is very important that reports are presented systematically and become a firmly established tradition of the Communist movement.

It points out that committees have to report to higher bodies. Members have to report on their work (weekly); they have to report at the first opportunity. It can be an oral report or a written report; it should be concise; it needs to pass on the necessary information; and the reports have to be discussed at meetings.

In our situation today I think we suffer a little from the tyranny of modern technology and communication methods, the tyranny of the phone system, which makes it so much easier in so many ways just to phone the National Office and give a report, and that’s very good, but there are drawbacks. I think we need many more written reports from the branches to the National Office. First of all, it’s cheaper. But also it provides a permanent record, reports of how things are going that are available to all national departments and that can, if we think it’s useful, reprint for all comrades’ information in *The Activist*.

There should be a mention made in this context of something else that we sometimes fall down on, the checking up on decisions that get made, in a branch, a fraction, in a committee that we’re involved in. We need to follow up on them. That’s a key aspect of good organisation, and it’s related to the question of reports, the other side of it.

Section IV of the theses is devoted to the question of propaganda and agitation. There are a lot of specifics, but I’ll draw out a few general points.

Communists must “take part in *all the day-to-day struggles and all the movements of the working class... Only by leading the working masses in the day-to-day struggle against the attacks of capitalism* can the Communist Party become the vanguard of the working class...” It’s the point I made before — we have to earn in struggle the right to be the vanguard, you can’t just proclaim it.

## Organisation & press

Section V is “On the Organisation of Political Struggles”, with lots of nitty gritty stuff on how to use leaflets and posters, how to build campaigns.

Section VI is “On the Party Press”. It states that “No paper can be recognised as a Communist organ unless it is subject to *party control*”. However, it does not specify any particular means by which such control should be exercised. In this regard, it’s useful to remember that up until 1917 when they became a mass party, with tens of thousands and then hundreds of thousands of members, none of the papers that the Bolsheviks used to present their ideas were official papers of the party. They were published by cooperative associations in which the Bolsheviks played a predominant, but by no means always, exclusive role.

The theses go on to point out that the communists should publish a quality paper, a skillfully written and presented paper. It has to be independent of the capitalists. It has to be “our best propagandist and agitator”.

The Comintern document points out that the paper “can only survive if party members are prepared to make substantial and regular financial and material sacrifices”.

“The Communists”, it states, “must be more than just lively canvassers and agitators for the paper; they must be useful contributors.” It notes that subscriptions “must be collected very systematically”.

Section VII is on “The General Structure of the Party Organisation” — the organisation of branches, districts and so on, and the question of discipline, how to organise.

49. The directives and decisions of the leading party bodies are binding on subordinate organisations and on all individual members.

50. In their public appearances members of the party are obliged *to act at all times as disciplined members of a militant organisation...* If the decision of the organisation or leading party body is in the view of certain other members incorrect, these comrades must not forget, when they speak or act in public, that to weaken or *break the unity of the common front* is the worst *breach of discipline* and the worst mistake that can be made in the revolutionary struggle.

And finally, section VIII is on “The Combination of Legal and Illegal Work”.

Well, these theses were drafted about 70 years ago, but there are still many useful principles there. They are worth reading by comrades, perhaps more than once, since the more times you read, the more you can glean from it.

## A dialectical concept

The Bolshevik experience gives us an important understanding of the interconnection of democracy and centralism, determined by the conditions of political work.

Before 1905, Lenin had to operate in very underground conditions, so centralism came to the fore. There were physical and political difficulties in implementing party democracy. For example, it was impossible to hold a party conference inside Russia. So party conferences had to be held abroad. The difficulties of doing this meant that they were rather infrequent events.

After 1905, conditions improved for democracy in the party, so that at the 5th congress in 1907 the stress was put on the election of party bodies and committees, and the concept of democratic centralism was formalised.

What is democratic centralism? James P. Cannon, wrote in *Letters from Prison*:  
Democratic centralism...is not a dogma to be understood statically as a formula containing the unchanging quantities of 50% democracy and 50% centralism. Democratic centralism is a dialectical concept in which the emphasis is continually being shifted in consonance with the changing needs of the party in its process of development.

A period of virtually unrestricted internal democracy, which is normally the rule during the discussion of disputed questions under legal conditions, can be replaced by a regime of military centralism for party action under conditions of external persecution and danger, and vice versa; and all conceivable gradations between these two extremes can be resorted to without doing violence to the principle of democratic centralism.

What is essential is that the right *emphasis* be placed at the right *time*. Bolshevism, far from any dogmatic rigidity ascribed to it by superficial critics, is distinguished by the great flexibility of its organisational forms and methods. This does not signify, however, that there are no definite rules, no basic principles. These principles, in fact, are unchanging in their *essence* no matter how flexibly the party may see fit to apply them in different situations.

In his particular situation he wanted to emphasise two of these basic principles and he set them down as follows:

1. The party is conceived as a combat organisation destined to lead a revolution. It is not a freethinkers' discussion club, not a mere forum for self-expression and self-improvement, imposing no personal obligations on its members. The party is not an



anarchist madhouse where everyone does as they please, but an army which faces the outside world as a unit.

2. Following from this, it is an unchanging party *law* that the party has the right to control and direct the political activity of each and every member; to be informed about and to regulate and supervise the relations, if any, of each and every member with political opponents of the party; and to demand of each and every member disciplined compliance with party decisions and instructions, and 100% — not 99% — *loyalty to the party*.

## Professional revolutionaries

Lenin and the Bolsheviks developed the idea of an organisation of *professional* revolutionaries. What does it mean? Not that all comrades are on full time, but that we all see our revolutionary activity as our life's work. We take a serious attitude to the enormous task we've set ourselves. We don't have a slipshod, half-hearted approach. We don't give up when the going gets tough, or when individual advancement is possible.

A professional revolutionary is someone who sees the highest purpose of his or her life as advancing the socialist revolution, that is, building the revolutionary party, and who is willing to accept any assignment within his or her capacity that will contribute to this goal.

Cannon refers to the idea that we're building a *combat* party. Of course, this doesn't mean that we're preparing for armed struggle now. Rather he was pointing to the fact that the struggle for socialism is a *struggle*, that the capitalist class will resort to any measures to defend their privileges and profits, including the sending of agent-provocateurs into the organisations of the oppressed. If the party is going to combat attempts by the capitalist state to destroy it, if it's going to be effective in organising and leading a political struggle against the rule of the capitalist class, it has to function in a disciplined manner, to be able to function as a well-drilled unit. Thus our military metaphors.

We're the most implacable opponents of capitalist militarism, but not pacifists. We're the strongest opponents of bureaucratism, but we know we need organisation and unity in action to win. Quoting from Montane again:

Whether something is revolutionary or not isn't determined by whether it is armed or unarmed, violent or non-violent, illegal or legal, insurgent action or mass struggle; anything that can and must be done in order to advance toward our ultimate objective, anything that will lead us to determine events and not trail after them, is revolutionary.

## A working-class party

And of course we're a *working class* party. It's axiomatic that we have an understanding of the role of the working class in the process of social transformation of capitalist society. Lenin stressed this in *What Is To Be Done?*: only in connection with a "really revolutionary class which spontaneously rises in struggle" does the type of organisation which he proposed in this pamphlet make sense.

So a Leninist party has to have a working-class orientation. We have to seek to be involved in the struggles of our class, to learn from them, but also to lead.

The party also has to have a flexible approach to tactics. We have to be able to engage in unity with other forces when possible. We have to have an approach to party-building tactics that vary with the situation. Lenin was a master at this, knowing when to split, when to unite. We have to have an attitude of tactical *flexibility*, not doctrinairism and sectarianism.

The party and its members need a *long view* of history. We're in it for the long haul as we know, so we need to have a historical perspective.

In a report to our National Committee in September 1980, Jim Percy elaborated on some of the party-building lessons we had learnt in the first 10 years of the DSP. He grouped some of these important lessons under four headings:

1. We had developed a broad leadership team, we were an inclusive party.
2. We were building an independent party.
3. We were a party built on Leninist organisational principles.
4. We were an ambitious party.

## An inclusive party

On the first point, the question of an inclusive team, Jim outlined in that report some of our experiences, some of the splits that we'd gone through, some of the fusions that we'd attempted — some which were failures, some which succeeded — but they showed the general thrust of our attempt to unite with other forces. He went through our history and our efforts in the '70s. He pointed out how we recruited from different periods and different cities, and comrades from different countries, and how these comrades recruited from different situations made up the current leadership of the party.

He pointed out that these sincere attempts at unity — the attempts to unite with other forces — laid the ground for future successes.

He said it also "allowed us to build a team — not a closed team but a team that was a pole of attraction and a framework for new and developing leaders".

That's been an ongoing process, especially in regard to young people. That's

something we can be very proud of in our party. We know that young people have been the backbone of the party, the reason for the success of our movement. It's how we started off and it's how we have renewed ourselves.

Also we've been especially successful in the development of women leaders in the party. Here we're unique on the left in this country, and possibly around the world, also.

And our experiences in the 1980s continued that approach we had in the 1970s, of reaching out. A report by Jim to a National Committee meeting in 1990 went through our efforts in that decade — the Nuclear Disarmament Party; the Charter process with the Communist Party and the attempt to set up a New Left Party; our efforts with the Socialist Party of Australia; and more recently our efforts with various Green forces.

As well as building a leadership team of the party and Resistance that is inclusive, and as well as reaching out to try to build the party and include new forces into the leadership of the party, we also want to make the most out of individual comrades. We don't want to waste cadre, take a cavalier attitude to comrades who might be going through a temporary slump, say. We have to make every effort to integrate all comrades into the party.

And we want to set high standards of activity, but not so high that people will feel unable to join, or maintain membership. This approach is especially relevant for Resistance. Cannon pointed out once that:

We don't want an excess of Bolshevisation [in the party, so that] every time we bring one person into the party we drive two others out by our impractical and unrealistic demands upon them ... We've got to grow up to the level of political people who are able to make use of members who want to belong to the party. Lenin was a great master at utilising material that wasn't 100% perfect and he even succeeded in making a revolution with this defective material. One of the best stories I have ever heard was the remark made by Serge Evrikoff, a leader of the Left Opposition and secretary of the party under Lenin, when he was in this country. He remarked to some American comrades, "You will never begin to understand the genius of Lenin or to appreciate him in his full stature. You know that he made a revolution, but you don't know the material he made it out of".

But while we seek to include in our ranks all genuine socialist revolutionaries, the DSP is not "all-inclusive" in the manner of the Labor Party or similar Social-Democratic fake-left parties in other countries. Such inclusiveness is suited only to parties not seriously intending to lead major social changes. It's a formula for doing nothing, a guarantee of acceptance of the status quo.

As Reihana's talk yesterday demonstrated, we need a party that selects its

membership on the basis of their agreement with our Marxist program and their willingness to work for its implementation. We seek to be inclusive of everyone who will help to build a revolutionary Marxist party, to build our cadre team.

So we're an inclusive party in the sense that we have a broad leadership team, we're always trying to absorb new leaders and expand the base of that team.

Because of the criteria we set down for membership in the party, we're also a politically homogeneous party, we agree on our basic revolutionary perspective. Without that level of agreement we couldn't function as a coherent unit. Jim's 1980 report put it like this:

[Our political homogeneity is] a relative thing, and we want it to be only a relative thing. But it's based on the attitude of comrades towards the party, a responsible way in which they raise differences and the way comrades, especially the leading comrades, have decided to operate in the framework of the party. That's one aspect of it. The other aspect is that we have had an ability to correct our mistakes. If we've made a mistake and we're convinced of that, we're very quick to rectify it.

He also pointed out that we're a structured team: "We've been able to develop a division of labour in the [National Executive] and in the National Committee."

## Loyalty

The DSP is a voluntary organisation, composed of individuals who have freely chosen to devote themselves to the task of aiding society's transition from capitalism to socialism.

As a voluntary union of revolutionaries, the party has both the right and the obligation to demand an unconditional loyalty to its program and organisation from all members and all who seek membership. Those who doubt the correctness of the Marxist program; those who deny the necessity of a revolutionary party; those who are opposed to building such a party — all such individuals are entitled to their views. But they are not entitled to membership in the Democratic Socialist Party. Loyalty to the DSP is the primary condition for membership.

Party loyalty is not an abstract idea, but a standard of political conduct. Loyal members always place the party's interests first. They defend it against its enemies. They work selflessly to build it. They seek to the best of their ability to implement its decisions, to abide by its discipline, and to adhere to its norms. They are party patriots because the party is the organisational embodiment of the revolutionary program and thus indispensable to the future which they desire for humanity.

We develop and cherish a strong *party spirit* that incorporates our strong feelings of party loyalty, the concern for the party, always putting the party first, and a real

sense of revolutionary elan and enthusiasm.

## Dedication & commitment

At the centre of this is the *dedication and commitment* of our members. We've said lots about this at the Resistance conference already, and it's a concept comrades here understand well.

Without it, we won't get to first base, let alone tackle the big political task we've set ourselves — building a party that can lead the workers and their allies in the struggle to overthrow this rotten system and the building of a new socialist society. In this task we'll need determination and courage and persistence.

Trotsky wrote that: "Revolutionaries may be either educated or ignorant people, either intelligent or dull, but there can be no revolutionaries without the will that breaks obstacles, without devotion, without the spirit of sacrifice."

Recall the earlier Montane quote, where he talked about "Those who do not lack determination and courage..."

Well, courage for us is not physical at the moment — we don't have to risk our lives to be revolutionaries — but there are two other very important aspects of courage. Firstly, the courage to persist in what we're doing. And secondly, the courage to take decisions, to lead, to act quickly in political situations when necessary.

This leadership role, this type of courage has to be based on education, on political experience, and the confidence that flows from that. It is based on the confidence from acting in the past, and being proved right, and having the confidence to act even more decisively in the future.

It's not a question of taking decisions decisively by bluff, tossing a coin, but from understanding. Obviously the help that the party can give with this to individual comrades is absolutely vital. We need decisiveness, but sometimes that courage is also expressed in the need to know when to hold back, when not to act.

Cannon, in *Letters from Prison*, addressed this. He pointed out that program, as always, came first, and we don't take it lightly.

But to stand firmly by the program, does not authorise us to repeat the same active political slogans all the time with the same degree of emphasis. That would reduce the art of politics to memory work and as the Old Man [i.e., Trotsky] once remarked, make every sectarian a master politician. The art of politics consists in knowing what to do next; that is, how to apply the program of Marxism to the specific situation of the day. We're an ambitious party, and that was one of the "four features" in Jim's report I mentioned. We have big goals, goals that we strive to meet. And ambition is important also in individuals — not the ego-tripping type of ambition, but the ambition that can

be good, if it's directed in the right way. We do set ourselves big goals, and the way to fulfill that ambition in the context of the party is to help others to lead!

## A supportive atmosphere

We need a comradely tone in the party and Resistance, in all our relations with other comrades. We aim to assist other comrades, and we shouldn't let our own ego or our big mouth get in the way.

We have to improve the level and tone of communication between comrades. We can't afford any backbiting, sniping, cliquishness, or gossip. We have to move right away from general discussions that dump on individual comrades — unfortunately there's been far too much of that in the revolutionary movement. The discussion has to be on how to go forward, how to solve political problems, how to help each other, how to build the party.

Trotsky wrote about the tone required by leaders:

A patient, friendly, to a certain point pedagogical attitude on the part of the central committee and its members towards the rank and file, including the objectors and the discontented...

Methods of psychological "terrorism", including a haughty or sarcastic manner of answering or treating every criticism or doubt — it is namely this journalistic or "intellectualistic" manner which is insufferable to workers and condemns them to silence.

Of course, critics are not always right, so there will be vigorous debate, but a political atmosphere and the correct, that is, comradely, tone will ensure the right outcomes of the debates.

## A political atmosphere

We have to raise the level of political discussion in the party and Resistance, at branch meetings, at executives, in national bodies. We need a political membership and a political atmosphere to sustain the party and find our way forward. It will be politics that recruits, trains, and educates the new generation, but even more so it's politics that retains the old generation, and if we can't keep the cadre we've got, it's going to be hard to bring on the new.

There'll be an increased importance in the period ahead for the leaderships of both the party and Resistance to spend the time in political discussion, initiating the political leadership of our organisations.

We all have a duty to educate ourselves. The importance of self-development and reading can't be stressed enough. Trotsky had a good little quote on a poster that I've

got: “Young people, study politics!” We have to study politics, and develop ourselves theoretically, that is, we have to assimilate Marxist theory and, above all, the Marxist *method* of understanding and changing the world. Without such an understanding we won’t be able to chart a correct course forward for the party and the working class.

We have to have concern for other comrades. We know we can’t build a utopian model of the future socialist society within the party — the party’s a tool to make the revolution. But there’s no need to make this shitty capitalist society any worse than it is. The party won’t be able to be a model of the future, but we should do our best. Wherever we can and our resources permit, we need to encourage structures, relations that make life a little easier for comrades in this lousy system.

We can’t level out all the inequalities we come into the party with, but some things can go in the right direction — our pledges and sustainer, for example, we encourage what comrades can afford. Members who gain skills, professions, good jobs should be motivated to place their skills at the disposal of the party, to see their assets and advantages as something that can help the party, not something for their individual advancement. Our members should be motivated to gain skills and qualifications not to bolster their own ego, or for the pursuit of money or luxuries, but in order to advance the struggle.

We can help our unemployed members find jobs. We can find support for comrades with special difficulties. Sometimes we’ll need to support high-school comrades who are forced out of home by hostile parents, find ways to support them, help them finish their studies if they want to. Members often live in party households out of economic necessity, let’s make virtues of that necessity, make them mutually supporting, special places to live. We can organise assistance for comrades with political study, with reading, with lending books. We can help comrades develop new skills. We are concerned about our members’ health, their happiness. We need to give them social support and help them fit in.

The party’s a special type of organisation already, founded on human solidarity, made up of people linked by political conviction, of all ages, all backgrounds. We’re linked through fighting a common struggle.

## What to avoid

OK, that’s a fair list of some of the features of our revolutionary party, the things we need in the party and in our members. Now I’ll just very briefly list some of the errors and dangers in our organisational work.

We can be *formalistic*. It’s not automatic that once you set up a committee that it will carry out its work, that it will take the right decision. That’s something we have to

be conscious of all the time.

We can be *routinistic*. We can stop thinking, we can just go plodding along the same old path, not being flexible, just sticking with routine methods.

We can be *sloppy*. A lackadaisical, slip-shod attitude towards party tasks is the mark of a petty-bourgeois dilettante rather than a proletarian revolutionary. “Slovenliness and slackness are Menshevik traits”, Cannon correctly observed in *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*. Things like punctuality, tidy offices, being meticulous about carrying out assignments — all those things are important.

Another danger that we have to be aware of is *apathy*. We can tend to let our morale slip, lose our drive. We can’t afford to rest on our laurels, even if we’ve made big sacrifices in the last year, or last month, or last week, achieved great things in the past. The future’s ahead of us. We have to be conscious of the future.

And finally, too often we hear comrades indulging in a bout of *whinging*. Expressions of whinging and pessimism can project onto others your own personal disgruntlement, and disorient new members, other comrades.

Well, I’m sure comrades could list many more of these type of faults, this is just a little listing.

## Factions

Reihana described very thoroughly the synthesis of democracy and centralism that our organisation requires, and some of the structures, responsibilities and rights, including factions. Within that framework I just want to briefly mention some harmful types of structures or tendencies that can develop, such as *factionalism*.

We defend the right to form factions, but are also aware of the potential dangers. The formation of a faction is a serious step, one that ought not to be undertaken lightmindedly. A faction should be formed only upon a clear platform, which is accepted by all its members.

The formation of unprincipled factions, in which political differences are glossed over in order to attain a larger number of votes on the basis of a fictitious unity, is a violation of principled socialist politics. Unprincipled factions are a direct importation into the party of alien class influences, namely the confusionist numbers game of bourgeois parliamentarism.

But contrary to the mythology peddled by the Stalinists in the past, the existence of factions is totally within the tradition of Leninist organisational principles. Trotsky, in 1939, wrote of the Bolshevik Party’s attitude to factions:

The entire history of Bolshevism was one of the free struggle of tendencies and factions.

In different periods, Bolshevism passed through the struggle of pro- and anti- boycottists,



“Otzovists”, ultimacists, conciliationists, partisans of “proletarian culture”, partisans and opponents of the armed insurrection in October, partisans and opponents of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, left-communists, partisans and opponents of the official military policy, etc., etc.

A revolutionary party can no more get along without the occasional appearance of factions than it can get along without free and open discussion among its members, for the possibility of differences developing to the point where factions are formed is implicit in every discussion of the party’s political line. It is, of course, preferable if differences can be settled short of the point of factional struggle, and this has very much been the case with us in recent years, where we’ve had a high degree of consensus and political homogeneity, but when disagreements are too deep for this to occur, then factions become a necessary part of the process by which the party determines its political line.

A faction which is publicly declared to the party as a whole, which attempts to persuade the party rather than to manipulate it behind the backs of the membership, which conducts its efforts within the framework prescribed by the National Conference and authorised party bodies, and which gives the party the degree of loyalty that is expected of every party member, is thoroughly in keeping with the norms of a democratic-centralist organisation.

What is *not* in the Leninist tradition is the formation of secret factions, with secret membership, secret leaders, secret documents, and secret discussion. Secret factions block the normal democratic centralist functioning of the party and heighten the danger that political differences will lead to a split in the party. Secret factions set forces in motion that cannot be controlled by their instigators.

When the questions around which a faction was formed have been resolved or superseded, it is normal for the faction to dissolve. Otherwise a danger of permanent factionalism is created. A permanent faction is a grouping which stays together regardless of significant political changes. It assumes that on any and every new question there will be differences along the old lines. It first discusses every new question within the permanent faction before taking it into party bodies. It works out its whole position first, submerging any disagreements that may divide it internally. It thus breeds unprincipled combinationism.

A permanent faction also serves as a breeding ground for *cultism*. Since it is not based on principled political agreement, an arbiter must emerge within the group to settle any differences — the leader exercising veto power to preserve the common front against the factional adversary.

Permanent factionalism leads to unprincipled manoeuvring and perpetual factional

warfare. It turns the party into a factional jungle, organised vertically. It is the permanent factions, organised from the top down, which have the real discussions on all matters that count. The elected leadership bodies lose their general authority and are reduced to meeting grounds of the heads of the warring factions. The membership loses its control over the leadership and the party loses both its internal democracy and its centralism.

## Cliques

In reality a permanent faction ceases to be a faction at all. It is no longer a grouping organised for a specific and therefore temporary purpose, but a gang of people who consider themselves “like-minded”, who are comfortable with one another, who are against someone else. In other words it is a *clique*. A clique is based upon matters essentially unrelated to real political questions: on friendship, wounded feelings, back-scratching, mutual likes and dislikes. It cannot attempt to win the whole party because it is exclusive rather than inclusive; its members do not think “we” and mean the party, they think of themselves as “we” and the rest of the party as “they”.

A clique is the very opposite of a principled faction. Whereas a principled faction announces its existence and basis to the party, a clique is by its very nature secretive and its “program” is unspeakable. Whereas a faction deals with the organisational question of leadership only to defend its political views, for a clique political questions are always subordinate to the “organisational question”, of whether the clique’s members had their feelings injured. A faction is a temporary grouping, to be dissolved into the party once the entire party has ruled on the issues in dispute, but a clique is a permanent mutual-assistance society. As James P. Cannon put it in *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*:

Cliques and cliquism and permanent factions are abhorrent to proletarian revolutionists who seek the realisation of their socialist aims through a workers’ mass movement led by a mass party. The only permanent formation that can claim our allegiance is the party.

Cliquism is a cancer in a revolutionary party. Because the clique rather than the party is the formation to which its members give their loyalty, a clique inevitably becomes a transmission belt by which hostile class pressures are exerted on the party.

## Party democracy

No leadership of any party has ever been infallible. The best leaders are those who are most capable of learning from the experiences of the entire party and the current stage of the class struggle and the mood of the working class and using this knowledge to

determine whatever changes may be necessary in the party's program of activity. But there is no way in which the leadership can obtain reliable feedback from the ranks if all levels of the party do not feel free to express their criticisms when the line or the method of implementing it appears to conflict with the requirements of the class struggle.

Our party is a voluntary union of revolutionaries, which solves its problems and sets its course by pooling its experiences and ideas and arriving at a collective decision. We join the party because we realise that a union of revolutionaries is more effective than the sum total of the efforts of individuals would be. But a party lacking internal democracy sacrifices one of the most important benefits of such a union — the opportunity to chart its political course on the basis of the collective knowledge of the leadership available to it.

There are many instructive experiences of inner-party disputes and factional struggles from the past history of the Bolshevik party, of the US SWP and the Fourth International, and of our own party as well. It's very useful for comrades to study these.

In recent years, there have been very few major differences in the party. There's been no factions or factional behavior since the early 1980s.

But we need to be familiar with some of the negative experiences. We've learnt to handle them better than most parties.

We also need to be conscious about cliquish behavior, some of the symptoms of cliques, even if there's not a fully-formed clique in the sense I've outlined above — feelings of arrogance and individualism; exclusiveness in social functions; gossip networks, that bypass the party or Resistance structures and formal channels.

## Resistance & the party

We're all very much aware of the unique relationship that exists between the DSP and Resistance. This aspect of building the revolutionary movement is something that we've developed better and further than any other party we think — we could teach others a lot. For example, the experiences of the Bolsheviks were fairly limited on this.

The DSP is committed to building an independent revolutionary youth organisation. Such an organisation can attract young workers and students who are not yet prepared to commit themselves to the Bolshevik perspective of becoming lifetime revolutionaries, but who are ready and eager to participate in revolutionary political action around a broad range of social and political issues. An independent revolutionary youth organisation enables young rebels to develop as revolutionary cadre, by having the opportunity to learn through their own experiences. In such an organisation they can

more easily acquire the political and organisational experience necessary for them to become members of the revolutionary socialist party. The youth organisation is thus a valuable reservoir of recruits for the revolutionary party.

The youth organisation and the party are not two revolutionary parties on different planes, but rather two organisations with different roles in building the revolutionary Marxist movement. This means that the party avoids the contradictions involved in trying to be simultaneously a party of professional revolutionaries and an organisation that can incorporate young people who are relatively new to revolutionary politics. The party is therefore able to maintain more uniform norms regarding the discipline, commitment, political maturity, and theoretical level.

In its political resolutions and actions Resistance has declared itself in political solidarity with the DSP. It sees the DSP as the essential programmatic nucleus of the future mass revolutionary workers' party that will be needed to lead the Australian socialist revolution. Resistance has therefore committed itself to building the DSP. The DSP supports and maintains fraternal relations with Resistance.

The DSP supports the organisational form Resistance has adopted — that is, a broadly based independent Marxist youth organisation. Resistance is organisationally independent of the DSP. It has its own conferences, adopts its own political line, decides on its own campaigns and priorities of work and elects its own branch and national leaderships. But Resistance has a unique political relationship with the DSP. While the DSP and Resistance are separate and independent organisations with different roles to play, they are part of the same revolutionary Marxist movement.

The DSP seeks to collaborate with and aid Resistance in its goal of building a mass revolutionary socialist youth organisation. In order to maximise this collaboration, the DSP encourages all its decision-making bodies to have Resistance representatives attend their meetings either as observers or as participants with equal speaking rights.

The DSP seeks to convince Resistance members of the necessity of building a revolutionary party and win them to the perspective of becoming professional revolutionaries by joining the DSP. This can best be done by those party members who are also members of Resistance.

The role of party members in Resistance can be summarised as follows:

1. To loyally build Resistance;
2. To educate Resistance members in the Marxist program;
3. To be exemplary in their level of political activity and in observing the organisational norms of Resistance;
4. To help develop the leadership needed to carry Resistance forward;
5. To win Resistance members to the perspective of becoming members of the

DSP.

Party members do not have an automatic right to become members of Resistance. The party makes them available for admission to Resistance, and the work they do there is party work. The party therefore has the right to regulate the activity its members carry out in Resistance. Party members in Resistance are subject to the party's discipline; for these members the discipline of the youth organisation is subordinate to the DSP's discipline. This means that party members in Resistance, even when they do not function as an organised fraction, still conduct their work in the youth organisation under the overall direction of the party. They are obliged, like all other party members, to loyally defend the party's program and decisions to members of Resistance. This also means that political questions that are under discussion in the party may not be raised by party members in Resistance unless authorisation to do so is given by the party. Any other procedure would interfere with democratic discussion in the party, since the whole party membership would not be able to participate in the discussion.

So Resistance is a training ground. Resistance doesn't select its members in the same way as the party. It's easy to join. We want consistent activists, but we welcome any level of activity. We don't set off-putting standards demanded of everyone. We try to politically motivate and inspire Resistance members to a higher level of activity, to the level of commitment that will qualify them for admission to party membership.

## Internationalism

Finally, we have to stress that we're an *internationalist* party and an internationalist movement.

We've hammered this theme very thoroughly throughout the Resistance conference. I'm sure all comrades understand it well. But it's something we have to reaffirm constantly.

We stress that we engage in solidarity because it's our duty, it's an international class struggle, and oppression and injustice in any corner of the globe is our concern.

We engage in solidarity also because it's in the interest of the struggle here. It trains and educates our comrades here, and workers and others too. The issues mobilise and recruit new activists here, and it inoculates our organisation against chauvinism and narrowness.

The Australian working class is an international working class, with a large percentage of migrants, with their international concerns, and we have to build on the basis of that.

It is impossible to be a revolutionary Marxist without at the same time being an internationalist. The program of socialism is an international program, and no narrowly

national party, no matter how well-intentioned, can hope to lead the working class of its own country to socialism.

We see ourselves as part of an international working-class revolutionary movement too. Our contact and links with revolutionaries in other countries has been invaluable in the formation and development of the DSP.

At certain stages in the development of the struggle and the development of revolutionary parties around the world, we would participate in an international organisation. The Third International in Lenin and Trotsky's time, for example, was obviously an important development that furthered the class struggle and aided the development of revolutionary parties around the world.

The Fourth International, however, founded in 1938, is a much more problematic organisation. We were part of it throughout the 1970s, and we left the FI in the mid 1980s. Our assessment of our experiences in the Fourth International, and the reasons why we left it in 1985, are set forth in the pamphlet *The Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International*, and in the exchange of correspondence we've had with them since then [see *The Activist*, Vol. 2, No. 6, July 1992].

Some of the problems of the Fourth International and the parties that affiliated to it included the fact that the parties were very small, often without any base in the working class and oppressed, without any real authority, yet many of them certainly had illusions of grandeur, and they adopted rigid structures and statutes for the international body as though they led mass working-class parties around the world.

This attitude was not as bad as most of the Trotskyist sects. The Fourth International made many mistakes and had lots of faults but was still a lot better than some of the sects we're familiar with. Nevertheless, it still suffered from the sectarianism unfortunately endemic in the small isolated Trotskyist groups.

## Cominternism

Very often the leadership of the FI has tried to impose a global line on parties, and intervene in parties around the world. They had a conception of democratic centralism operating on an international scale in much the same way it is applied by national parties — what we have referred to as Cominternism. That is, they conceived of the FI as a centralised *world* party, like the Comintern. But the Comintern, in contrast to the FI, had a leadership that enjoyed enormous respect and political authority because it had led a revolution. And, in Lenin's day, that leadership was very cautious in how it used its authority to lead the international organisation.

We learned early on the necessity for an independent party, a party that is able to stand on its own, think things out for itself.

The most fundamental difference between the situations facing national parties and an international organisation of revolutionary parties stems from the uneven unfolding of the world revolutionary process. Although the objective conditions for socialism exist on a world scale, socialist revolutions occur within national boundaries, and the stage of the class struggle can vary widely even between neighboring countries.

To lead the workers and other oppressed of any country in the overthrow of capitalism requires a party that is not only internationalist but also “home grown” — a party that knows the thoughts of the country’s working class because it is based in that class. It requires a party that at crucial points can stand on its own and have the confidence to make decisions because it has learned through its own experience and has trained and selected a leadership in which it is confident.

The Leninist concept of how an international of revolutionary parties should operate is quite different from the monolithism of the Comintern under Stalin or the caricature of that model provided by some of the Maoist sects, and is different from the conception of most of the Trotskyist sects, and the Fourth International as well. This was laid down very clearly for us by James P. Cannon:

...we don’t believe parties which will permit proconsuls to be imposed upon them as leaders are worth a damn. We don’t think a revolutionary party anywhere amounts to much until it is able to throw up a cadre of indigenous leaders, who have grown out of its struggles, who are known to its members and trusted by them. You can’t monkey with the question of leadership.

We came out of the Comintern, as I said, and we remembered the crimes of the Comintern. “Socialism in one country” was not the only crime. One of the greatest crimes was the destruction of the self-acting life of the individual communist parties. The Stalinist Comintern overthrew the indigenous leaders everywhere. Where they couldn’t overthrow them directly, they would conspire against them, set faction on foot, with secret backing, to undermine and finally get rid of all the independent characters in the leadership.

Cannon’s relations with Trotsky in this regard are set down in his *History of American Trotskyism*, and also in his talk “Internationalism and the SWP”, reprinted in *Speeches to the Party*. They were very clear lessons, and we took them to heart too.

In the early 1980s the current leadership of the US SWP headed by Jack Barnes began doing to us what Cannon would not have accepted from Trotsky, and we reaffirmed our understanding of the need for an independent party. This was one big component of the US SWP’s sectarian degeneration in the 1980s. They tried to intervene in our party and challenge our leadership team when they saw we were thinking for ourselves, standing on our own feet. We broke off relations with them — we had

learnt well the lessons from Cannon about Cominternism, and applied them to the US SWP.

But we are still the most internationalist in our political outlook — providing solidarity to struggles; reaching out to and trying to foster links with fellow revolutionaries in our region and around the world; learning from the experiences and struggles of other comrades around the world.



I hope this outline will help comrades to a better understanding of our organisational concepts and methods, and how to be a better revolutionary socialist today.

Many of these concepts would already be familiar to comrades. Many are truisms, they're obvious, but all too often have been ignored or breached in the revolutionary movement in the past. And I hope this talk will have encouraged comrades to go to the sources, to read, to study the history of the movement on this question.

The organisation question is a political question of the highest order. In the history of our party and Resistance, it's been key. Our seriousness on this has been central to our formation, our growth, our existence.

The right approach on these questions will be essential for the development of a mass revolutionary socialist party and youth movement that's essential for bringing about fundamental social change here and around the world. ■



# Selecting a National Leadership Team

*By Doug Lorimer*

In this talk I want to look at how the Democratic Socialist Party selects its national leadership team, the National Committee. The general concepts and methods used by the party are also applicable to the selection of the national leadership body of Resistance — the National Council — since Resistance shares the same goals, political perspectives and organisational principles as the DSP.

## The most important of questions

Forty years ago, in a speech to the National Committee of the US Socialist Workers Party on “Factional Struggle and Party Leadership”, which is published in the book *Speeches to the Party*, James P. Cannon observed that the “only barrier between the working class of the world and socialism is the unsolved problem of leadership”. Expanding on this statement, Cannon added:

...until the working class solves the problem of creating the revolutionary party, the conscious expression of the historic process, which can lead the masses in struggle, the issue remains undecided. It is the most important of all questions — the question of the party.

But Cannon went on in the same speech to note that “the problem of the party is the problem of the leadership of the party”. The leadership of the party, Cannon explained, “plays the same decisive role in relation to the party as the party plays in relation to the class”. That is, the construction of the leadership of the party is the *key* to the construction of the party itself.

In discussing the problem of the construction of the leadership of the party — the most important of all questions — we have to begin by looking at what our conception

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of leadership is.

What is leadership in our party? Our answer to that question cannot begin with party leadership itself, but with the character of the party we seek to build. And the character of the party we seek to build is, in turn, determined by our strategic aim. Our strategic aim is to educate and mobilise the workers and their allies to bring into being a working people's government as the first step in abolishing the capitalist social order and constructing a classless, socialist society.

The kind of party that is needed to lead that social transformation is a party that is working class in its political program, outlook, methods, and experience, and that is composed of individuals who, regardless of their class origins, strive in a disciplined way to help the party lead the working class in carrying out a socialist revolution.

The sort of party we're trying to build is one in which *every* member is a leader. We strive to *maximise* the leadership capabilities of every single party member. That's what we mean by a cadre party — a party in which all members are trained as political leaders and are prepared to train others as political leaders.

So, for us, leadership development is not an individual question. It is a question of the development of the party itself.

## Collective strength

This is the opposite of everything we're taught by capitalist society about leadership, where leadership is conceived of in purely individual terms.

The party, of course, is made up of individuals. But our strength is in our *collectivity*, not our individuality. Our strength, like that of the working class, is in our ability to *act together*. Every class-conscious worker knows that individually he or she has very little power, that the strength of the working class lies in collective action. Solidarity, cooperation and disciplined collaboration are the essence of working-class power. Alone we are nothing, but acting together we can change the world.

This is the opposite of the consciousness created by bourgeois conditions of life. For the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, success *does* depend on individual action. Competition, not collective effort, is the precondition for their survival and success: you defend and advance your interests only by pitting yourself against and defeating everyone else. And for the individual capitalist, his or her successes depend not only in competing with and defeating other capitalists, but upon exploitation and rule over another class.

In the party, by contrast, success comes from collective effort, from collaboration with others who share and are committed to our revolutionary goals and perspectives. Our strength lies in our ability to function as a *team*. Our concern with developing

individuals as leaders is not to promote egocentric “self-fulfillment”, but to increase our *collective strength*.

## Being political

This brings us to the first aspect of leadership in a revolutionary working-class party — the ability to see ourselves in relation to the party, not the party in relation to ourselves. We derive our personal satisfaction as revolutionary activists from helping to make our party team stronger, in maximising the effectiveness of our collective effort. And the effectiveness of the party depends on what we do *as part of a team*, through the branches, the fractions, the party’s leadership committees.

That’s why we stress that every single assignment in the party is a collective task. We don’t assign a member a task and then, if they are unable to carry it out, lay the blame on them as an individual. The comrades who have given the assignment — the branch, or the branch executive, or the fraction, or the national leadership bodies — are responsible for the member who undertakes the assignment. Every assignment is a *collective responsibility*, and must be worked on in a collective way.

In his book *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* Cannon listed a series of basic working-class attitudes to party leadership and organisation, such as being 100% loyal to the party; having a serious and professional attitude to the organisation of the party and to all aspects of its work; being deady opposed to gossip, cynicism, bureaucratism and supersensitivity to criticism, and many more.

At the heart of these attitudes is having a *political* approach to everything we do. That is, everything we do as political activists has to be seen in relation to our strategic goal — building the sort of party that can lead a socialist revolution. Only when we approach and understand how our tasks today, what we are doing right now, this hour, are related to this strategic goal, will we feel confident about what we’re doing, where we’re going, why it’s important. We always have to be thinking in broad political terms.

Related to this is the need for *objectivity* in everything we do. That is, our starting point has to be the *needs of the party*. One of the characteristics of leadership in our party is a willingness to subordinate one’s own personal considerations to the needs of the party.

## Training others to lead

I said earlier that our conception of the party as a cadre party means we’re a party in which we strive to train all members as leaders and in which every member is trained to train others to be leaders. This brings us to a second aspect of what leadership is in

our party: leaders are those who help *others* to lead.

There are a number of ways we can do this.

Firstly, leaders have the responsibility to carefully prepare and explain every proposal and decision they make, so that the membership understands not only *what* we are doing, but *why*.

Leaders are those who work with and seek to develop the self-confidence of every member as a critically thinking, experienced political activist who understands not just the tasks and tactics of the moment, but the fundamental strategic concepts that determine our always-changing tactics.

Our need to help every single member develop his or her political understanding and leadership capabilities is one of the reasons we organise our work through committees.

Of course a committee, a team of comrades, functions better than an individual, since we all have individual weaknesses. Working collectively, as a team, helps us to balance each other and compensate for our individual weaknesses. This applies not only to implementing decisions but also to the process of thinking out what we need to do.

But working through committees is also how to develop comrades as leaders, to train new members to take over from us. That's why it's more important to us how a committee functions than how an individual does. It is more important that a committee — a branch executive, for example — functions well and takes more and more responsibility, than to have a single super-efficient, high-powered organiser. This is because *how* you do things is more important than *what* you do. People learn by how they do things, not by what particular momentary thing they do. A single super-active organiser may get a particular task accomplished more quickly than a committee. But such an approach doesn't train others to lead. The measure of success of a leader in our party is how well you've prepared others to lead our party team.

Secondly, leaders are those who give every single member a fair chance to participate in the party team, who work with each and every member in the same way, without favoritism. Leaders are those who see themselves as leaders of the *whole* party, not any particular category of the party's membership.

Every member of the party must have confidence that every leader of the party will treat them in a comradely manner, give them an objective hearing, a fair go, and be able to have working relations with them on the same footing as every other member.

## Taking general responsibility

Leadership development in the party is not some sort of career path, where you advance up a hierarchy of posts. That, of course, is how the rest of the world, how

bourgeois society, works. But that's not the way things work in the party. This brings us to a third aspect of what leadership is in our party: Leaders are those who lead in *whatever* they do. They never reject responsibility because they do not have a post or are not on a leadership committee. They treat every task and assignment they take on in a serious and professional manner, without concern for irrelevancies like personal prestige and status.

Moreover, leaders are those who, in addition to their responsibility within whatever division of labour we have in our party team, are always taking *general responsibility* for the development of the party, including the development of other leaders.

Because they take general responsibility for the development of the party, leaders weigh carefully any criticisms or proposals they have. They raise their ideas, criticisms and proposals in a way that will help, not disrupt, hinder or undermine, the development of the party. The more leadership responsibility you take on, the more your actions and opinions can have an impact on the functioning of the party. Leaders have less right, not greater leeway, to indulge in personal whims.

## The National Committee

Precisely because we are a cadre party, the leadership of the party is always broader than the elected leadership bodies of the party. The national leadership is always broader than the National Committee.

What is the National Committee?

The first thing to note is that it is a *committee*. Being an individual member of the National Committee doesn't really mean much in and of itself. But the NC as a *committee* means a great deal. When the NC meets and makes decisions as a committee it acts as the national leadership of the party. That's what's important.

The second thing to note is that being elected to the NC does not *make* you a leader of the party. The *election* of the NC is not so important as it often seems. It's not a historic event in the class struggle. It's simply a way of democratically formalising a rounded team of comrades who are *already* leaders. The election of the NC simply reflects something that has already taken place.

Being elected to the NC has nothing to do per se with being a leader. Either you're a leader or you're not. If you are, and if the conference delegates recognise this and elect you to the NC, good. If they don't, wait until the next party conference. Over time the party sorts out who it looks to for leadership, who is leading in practice, and this is formalised in the election of its leadership bodies.

Of course, if the conference delegates don't recognise *enough* of the national leadership of the party when they elect the National Committee, then we would have

a real problem. A disparity would develop between the real leadership of the party and the formal leadership. The purpose of the way we select the National Committee is to minimise such a disparity developing, so that when the *formal* leadership body meets it includes enough of the *real* leadership of the party to have the authority to make decisions for the party as a whole. If it doesn't, it won't have the confidence of the membership and it therefore won't have the authority to lead the party.

## Democracy & leadership selection

Well, how can we best ensure that the elected national leadership committee does include the real leadership of the party?

In the history of the socialist movement there have been a number of different methods for selecting a national leadership committee. One method, which existed in the pre-World War I socialist parties and continues to be used by Social-Democratic parties like the ALP, is simply to throw the floor of the national conference open for nominations. However, as Cannon observed in his book *Letters from Prison*:

That only throws the delegate body into disorganised confusion and facilitates the manipulation of the election by means of secret slates and horse trades, the favorite method of Social-Democratic pseudo-democrats.

Unlike the election of a branch executive — where all the members of the branch know those who are nominated, and can therefore make an informed decision when they elect the branch's leadership body — the delegates to the national conference may not even know all the nominees, let alone their leadership capabilities. It will therefore be extremely difficult for the delegate body to make a conscious, well-deliberated selection of a rounded national leadership team. This situation and the time constraints that inevitably exist in discussing all the nominations, tends to lead to the stitching up of secret slates or tickets of nominees through back-room “numbers” deals and vote-trading during the course of the conference. As Cannon observed:

The democratic impulses of the rank and file incline them to react unfavorably to “slates”, as they feel, not without reason, that they narrow down for all practical purposes the [delegates'] freedom of choice. The Social-Democratic politicians, who are as undemocratic a collection of rascals as one can ever expect to meet, have always exploited this sentiment by announcing their firm, democratic opposition to slates. Of course, there was a little catch to their virtuous slogan of “no slates”. They meant no openly avowed slates which would possibly be open to discussion and amendment. Instead of that, the noble Social-Democrats rig up secret slates by means of horse trades and petty bribes to ensure their control. A good 50 percent of Social-Democratic convention “politics” is always devoted to this kind of business.

A different method of selecting a national leadership committee was adopted by the early Communist parties. This method was an improvement over that used in the Social-Democratic parties, but it also had serious draw-backs, as Cannon explained:

From the first days of American Communism, which also coincided with the first appearance on the scene of a new type of leader with a new conception of “politics”, we tried to break through the “no-slate” fraud and devise a more honest system by which the leaders would take open responsibility for their proposals and give reasons for their preferences in the makeup of the leading committee. It became rather common practice for the leading committees, in national as well as local conventions in the communist movement, to propose a slate of candidates for the new committee to be elected. We carried the practice with us in the independent movement for Trotskyism. (During factional struggles the slate-making arrangements were carried on in the separate caucuses of the factions.) This method was, without doubt, far superior to the “no-slate” tricks of our socialist predecessors, being more honest, and in the essence of the matter, even more democratic.

But this system also was not free from negative aspects, and even dangers. I perceived some of them long ago, have thought much about the matter, and from time to time have tried to devise corrective experiments. What impressed me most of all was the quite obvious fact that while the presentation of a slate of candidates by the leadership is the most “efficient” way to get through the business of election of the NC — usually the last point on the agenda, carried through in a great hurry — it concentrates too much power in the leadership just at that very point — the convention — where the democratic corrective of rank-and-file control should be asserted most strongly.

That is, the method of having the outgoing leadership committee present a slate of nominees, while introducing a more *conscious* aspect into the process of selecting the incoming national leadership committee, can deprive the delegates elected by the branches of any real *input* into the selection of the nominees to be voted on. It may therefore lead to the selection of a national leadership team that does not enjoy the full political confidence of the membership as a whole. Cannon pointed out:

It is not the election of the central, most prominent and influential leaders themselves. That problem solves itself almost automatically in the interplay of party work and internal strife. The problem arises over the selection of the secondary leaders, the new committee members, the potential leaders of the future. As a rule this part of the slate if presented by the most authoritative central leaders, is accepted, whether enthusiastically or not, by the convention; many delegates are reluctant to oppose them.

...the committee members from the districts and the younger members of the committee generally, who are active in local work, are closer to the rank and file than

the central leaders of the party are, and represent them more directly and intimately. This gives them a special function in the NC of extraordinary importance.

Their presence represents a form of continuing rank-and-file control and supervision over the central leaders. They can fulfill this function, however, only insofar as they are people of independent influence and popularity in their own localities; only insofar as they are freely elected on their own merits, not handpicked.

In contrast to both of these methods, Cannon proposed that the US SWP adopt a method that could ensure a free *and* well-deliberated selection of the national leadership committee by the conference delegates — the nominations commission method. This is the method our party has used since its inception.

## The Nominations Commission

What is the role and what are the responsibilities of the Nominations Commission? The Nominations Commission is a committee made up of elected delegates from each party branch whose task is to meet during the conference to prepare a list of nominations for the National Committee and to bring it before the entire body of conference delegates to open the nominations for the election of the NC.

Each delegate on the Nominations Commission is elected from among his or her branch's delegates by the membership of their branch. They therefore enjoy the confidence of the membership in carrying out their responsibilities. Each delegate on the Nominations Commission should be a comrade who is familiar with the leadership capabilities of their branch's members. They should be someone who the members have confidence in to give a fair and objective hearing to the submissions made to the Nominations Commission.

In addition to these elected branch delegates, the Nominations Commission has a non-voting chairperson appointed by the outgoing National Committee — a comrade who is familiar with the outgoing NC and the role that has been played on it by each of its members. This comrade's task is to help lead the Nominations Commission in drawing up its list of nominees, and to present a report to the conference on the considerations used by the Nominations Commission in formulating its list of nominees. This comrade, however, does not have a vote on the Nominations Commission. The final decision on the Nominations Commission's list of nominees rests with the delegates elected by the membership.

The Nominations Commission chairperson should not dominate the commission's discussions. Rather, his or her task is to ensure that all of the delegates on the commission are able to have an input into the commission's deliberations and to help keep its discussions from getting side-tracked from the task of making a fair and objective



selection of a balanced list of nominations for the National Committee.

While each of the delegates on the Nominations Commission *represents* their branch, once the Nominations Commission commences its work as a committee, their *responsibility* is not to their own particular branch but to the conference, to the party as a whole. The responsibility of the Nominations Commission, and of each of its members, is to help the conference elect a *national* leadership team. This is their task, above and beyond any branch considerations.

In carrying out this task, the Nominations Commission must function with *confidentiality*. Without such confidentiality it couldn't do its job. Each of its members, and each comrade who comes before it to submit nominations for consideration by the Nominations Commission, must feel free to express their opinions frankly. They must have confidence that their comments, and the discussions of the Nominations Commission as a whole, will not be reported back to their branch delegations and will die when the Nominations Commission has completed its work.

In addition to the nominations that are made by the members of the Nominations Commission itself, the commission sets aside time during the conference when other delegates, both full and consultative, can come before it to make submissions — nominations, motivations, observations and proposals. It may ask particular delegates to come before it to provide information to help it in its deliberations. The party's Constitution states specifically that “the chairperson of the Nominations Commission or the commission as a whole may seek advice from the national officers of the party”.

Through this process the Nominations Commission ensures that it has input from the members of the outgoing National Committee and the “rank-and-file” delegates elected by the branches.

The last act of the Nominations Commission is to present its report and list of nominations to the conference. Once this is done, the commission ceases to exist and each of the delegates who served on it resumes their normal responsibilities as conference delegates with the right to put forward other nominations for election to the National Committee. Furthermore, once the Nominations Commission has completed its work and dissolved none of the comrades who served on it can speak on behalf of, or be asked to speak on behalf of, the commission.

## Criteria for selecting the National Committee

What are the criteria that the Nominations Commission needs to consider in selecting its list of nominations for election to the NC?

Firstly, the National Committee must be composed of members who the delegates feel will *loyally implement* the general political line and tasks adopted by the conference.

This is the primary reason why the election of the NC takes place at the end of the conference, that is, after the conference has decided these questions.

Secondly, the National Committee must be an *inclusive* and not an exclusive body. It must represent the totality of different types of leaders in the party — not just what one person may consider the “best” type, i.e., the most capable organisers and administrators, or the most theoretically knowledgeable, or the best orators, or best writers, etc. The National Committee is not just a collection of individual leaders. It must be put together as a rounded *team* of leaders that reflects the different talents, capabilities and strengths within the leadership of the party. This, by the way, is why the Nominations Commission report does not individually motivate each of those on its list of nominations.

Thirdly, the National Committee should reflect the different leadership responsibilities in the party — the different leadership responsibilities in the branches and in the national staff of the party, the different leadership responsibilities in carrying out the political and organisational work of the party at all its levels.

Sometimes assignments, particularly national assignments, are carried out by comrades who the members of only one branch know very well, or maybe no branch knows well. Of course, the point is not that any of these comrades should be considered for membership of the NC solely *because* of their responsibilities, but that the Nominations Commission should be careful not to overlook considering them.

Fourthly, the Nominations Commission’s deliberations should not be overly marked by the contributions members make to the preconference or conference discussion. Comrades may make particular contributions to the discussion that help clarify particular questions and therefore may strongly plant themselves in the minds of the delegates. Of course, helping to clarify questions in the discussion is an important contribution to leading the party. But in assessing any particular comrade’s leadership capabilities, and what they may contribute to the national leadership team, their activity and demonstrated capacity for sound political judgment over a *longer* period of time needs to be considered. The same point applies to comrades who have carried out a particular assignment that may have made them well-known throughout the party.

Fifthly, while the National Committee must reflect the leadership responsibilities in the party today, it also needs to represent — to the extent possible — leadership responsibilities that the party will be confronted with in the future. It has to reflect where we’re going, not just where the party is at today.

Sixthly, the National Committee needs to reflect a balance between leadership continuity and leadership renewal. The core of the NC should be the most tested and experienced leaders of the party over an extended period of time. But the team must

be constantly renewed with new leaders.

Of course, as I stated earlier, the National Committee has to represent the real leadership of the party. Election to the National Committee cannot be seen as a means of developing comrades to be leaders. All it can do is register, as accurately and objectively as humanly possible, the progress made *before* the conference in developing new leaders. The task of developing new leaders is not the job of the Nominations Commission or of the election of the NC. It is a job that begins in the branches, the fractions and working groups. That's where our conscious leadership development process takes place.

Finally, the Nominations Commission has to keep in mind that both the full and candidate members of the National Committee are *members* of the NC. Candidate members have the same rights and responsibilities as the full members, with one and only one exception — while the full members have decisive vote, the candidate members have a consultative, that is, indicative, vote.

What is the purpose of the category of candidate membership of the NC? It is a reserve of leaders who are permanent candidates for election by the full members of the NC to the full membership of the National Committee in the event of vacancies occurring on the full membership from one conference to the next.

The candidate list tends to be more subject to change from one conference to the next than the list of full members. The candidate membership, in general, tends to have more of the new leaders of the party on it than the full membership. While new leaders may be included on the candidate list because they will benefit from the experience of being on the NC, this should not be the key criterion in their selection. Rather, *all* of the members on the candidate list should be leaders whose *contributions* will be of benefit to the NC in leading the party.

There tends to be more continuity in the list of full members of the NC from one conference to the next because its core consists of the most tested and experienced leaders of the party over an extended period, through different phases of the party's development. However, it is natural for there to be some movement back and forth from the candidate to the full list, and occasionally the election of comrades to the full list who have not previously been on the candidate list. Leadership responsibilities change as the party develops, as its tasks and responsibilities change, and it is inevitable that the composition of the national leadership team should reflect this.

## Applying the criteria

These basic criteria for selecting the National Committee are not complicated. What is complicated — as every comrade who has served on a nominations commission will

attest — is weighing all the nominations that are submitted against these criteria and working out a list of nominations to present to the conference that meets these criteria.

In carrying out this task, the Nominations Commission must be fair and objective. It can't be concerned with who gets left off the list. Its concern must be getting a good combination *on* the NC, getting a list of nominations that will have the political confidence of the party membership.

Now, the list of nominations that is presented by the Nominations Commission may not have been reached by unanimous vote. That's one reason why it presents a *list* of nominations and any delegate, including those who served on the Nominations Commission, is free to make *further* nominations after the Nominations Commission has presented its list of nominations. However, because of the composition of the Nominations Commission, the way its members are selected, the lengthy collective process it goes through in carrying out its assigned task — it is more likely to come up with a *more balanced* list of nominations than any individual delegate could come up with. That is why the Nominations Commission list of nominations carries such authority with the delegates as a whole.

Since the leadership of the party will always be larger than the NC, there are always comrades qualified to serve on the NC beyond those put forward by the Nominations Commission. The National Committee is not the entirety of the national leadership of the party; it is a committee *of* the national leadership. It is therefore natural that there will be other nominations put forward after the Nominations Commission has presented its list of nominations.

In making additional nominations, delegates are not obligated to demotivate anyone on the list presented by the Nominations Commission. The Nominations Commission list is simply that — a *list of nominations*. It is not a slate. On the other hand, if delegates do make additional nominations they have the *right* to demotivate any nominees that have already been presented.

Now, there's always a temptation when other nominations have been made to attempt to get around the difficult problem of having to *select* a committee out of the broad layer of comrades who are qualified to serve on the NC by expanding the size of the National Committee. Of course, if, after considering the Nominations Commission list and any other nominations that are made from the conference floor, the majority of delegates believe that all of the nominees on the Nominations Commission list should be on the National Committee but that the commission has made a serious oversight in not including some other leaders on its list, then it may not necessarily be a mistake to expand the size of the NC. But such a decision should not be used as a means to *avoid* the hard thinking to make the necessary choices to select a national

leadership committee out of the larger number of comrades who are part of the leadership of the party.

It should be borne in mind that if the conference delegates decide to expand the size of the NC to allow for the election of more nominees than those on the Nominations Commission list, this does not mean that any particular nominee is automatically guaranteed election to the NC. If the delegates vote to expand the size of the NC to accommodate some additional nominations, every delegate is entitled to put further nominations. So voting to expand the size of the NC beyond the number of members that the Nominations Commission has operated on in drawing up its list of nominations does not necessarily avoid the task confronting all of the delegates — to *select* from all those nominated a committee of the national leadership of the party. In fact, voting to expand the size of the NC *in order* not to face up to this responsibility undermines the very purpose of having a Nominations Commission and can make the election of the NC a perfunctory exercise.

## Size of the National Committee

This, of course, raises the obvious question — how do you decide what is an appropriate size for the National Committee?

In making its recommendation to the conference on the size of the incoming National Committee, the outgoing NC will seek to weigh up a number of factors.

The National Committee must be large enough to reflect all the criteria I've already outlined — to be a rounded team that represents the totality of different types of leaders in the party, the different leadership responsibilities in the party, the continuity of leadership and the renewal of leadership in the party, to reflect where the party is at and, to the extent possible, where it's going. The NC must be large enough to include enough of the leadership of the party to ensure that it's a leadership committee that will enjoy the political confidence of the membership to make decisions that will be binding on the whole party.

However, it cannot be so large that it is unable to meet regularly, with all its members being able to attend. Nor can it be so large that, when it does meet, only a small proportion of its members will have the opportunity of contributing to its discussions. When the National Committee meets it must have the *possibility* of getting contributions from all its members in arriving at its decisions.

Of course, between conferences comrades who are not on the NC may take on leadership responsibilities that give them experiences that the NC needs to have input from in order to effectively lead the party. It has always been our practice, as part of the ongoing process of building an inclusive national leadership team, to invite such

comrades to attend NC meetings and to allow them to contribute to its discussions.

## Election of the National Committee

I've already mentioned that the Nominations Commission list is not a slate that has to be amended by taking names off it in order to put forward further nominations. The same thing applies to the election of the NC. When we elect the National Committee, the delegates vote *for* the nominees they think should be on the NC. They are not asked to choose whom they *don't* want on it. The conference delegates, democratically elected by the membership in their branches, write down on their ballot papers the names of the nominees they want to see on the NC. They don't have to write down the names of the nominees they don't think should be on it. This is true no matter how many nominations there are.

There's an important political consideration behind this approach. It's not the party's job to pick people *not* to be leaders or *not* to take on leadership responsibilities. It's not our job to put obstacles in any comrade's way to shouldering leadership responsibilities. Of course, when we elect someone to a certain leadership committee we are excluding other comrades from having that formal responsibility at that time. But that exclusion is never our starting point.

We are for maximising every party member's leadership development and experience, and maximising the formal decisions that reflect and encourage that development and experience. The nominations commission method is one of the formal mechanisms that most effectively enables us to do this. It is a means of maximising the delegates' ability to participate in the free and well-deliberated selection of our national leadership team. As Cannon noted in *Letters from Prison*: "All of these measures will not guarantee the election of an ideal National Committee. But they should help to provide us with the best committee that a free party can select from the material at hand by the method of party democracy. If the returning delegates go home with the feeling that this has been accomplished, the new NC will be able to begin its work with a strong authority. On the other hand, the leadership, precisely because of the care and deliberation taken in the selection of the personnel of the NC, will feel itself to be more than ever under the watchful supervision and control of the party". ■

# The Party, the Political & the Personal

*By Pat Brewer*

When someone applies to join the party and the members of a branch vote to admit them, that person is voluntarily entering an organisation with expectations and norms of behavior that are quite different to other political organisations in Australia today. These norms — codified in the constitution and other party documents — not only spell out how we organise ourselves, and what level of activity party membership requires, they also emphasise ethics, methods of work, responsibilities and attitudes toward other members which are radically different from those of any other organisation in this society.

The rights and duties of membership are spelt out in the party's constitution and should be studied in detail. Of course, the way we apply these are determined by the political situation we face and are subject to change as the political context changes.

Because of its political basis, the party expects its members to act towards one another with honesty and responsibility. Cynicism, egotistical behavior and personal enmities are counterproductive to the political solidarity and trust which are essential to building a disciplined team of activists which can act in a cohesive and united manner. We don't expect everyone to be friends within the party, but we do expect that we treat one another as comrades and minimise personal ructions and clashes as much as possible. We can't function as a political team unless we all learn to work together.

Sometimes it is difficult to draw the line between the personal rights of individual members and their responsibilities to the party as a whole and vice versa — the responsibility of the party to the individual member. There is often a grey area between comrades' private life and their public, or political, activity with regard to the party and

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its obligations that can be very confusing at times. In the rest of this article I want to elaborate some of the areas where such confusions can arise.

## The party & personal life

One of the slogans that emerged out of the second wave of the women's movement was that "the personal is political". This reflected the realisation that many of the problems that women had previously thought of as individual problems really stem from social oppression. Personal life is not private and individual, but is shaped by the prevailing socio-economic relations. Domains previously thought of as individual and private — the family, self-images, sexuality, sexual preferences, personal and emotional experiences — interact with and are shaped by economic, political and social forces.

Does this mean that there is no such thing as the personal? That when you join a party like the DSP every aspect of your life comes under the authority of the decisions of the party? The answer is clearly no. The DSP is not a totalitarian party. Its jurisdiction does not encompass everything. The party is a political organisation that aims to promote united action by the exploited and oppressed against the root cause of exploitation and oppression — the capitalist social order.

At the same time, there are many areas where the party does not assert a position or exercise its authority. These include, for example, rival theories in mathematics or natural science; competition between artistic and literary schools; matters of dress, diet, amusement, etc. In the personal life of the individual the party doesn't try to tell people what kinds of friends they may have, who they should live with, whether or not they should marry, whether to have children, etc.

There are two exceptions where the party does take a position on interpersonal and sexual relations. We wholeheartedly condemn paedophilia as exploitative and reactionary, and we do not condone violence between party members. Of course, we also fight against its causes as part of our political program and practice.

And there is the more general point of party concern — if a comrade's personal actions affect the political tasks of the party, the party will discuss out the problem with the comrade concerned to try to resolve the problem politically with a mutually agreed solution. But in the final instance, the interests of the collective, of the party, take precedence over the actions of any single individual whose behavior is adversely affecting the party's work.

Other than on these two issues, the party doesn't interfere in the personal life of its members. This particularly applies to one of the most sensitive and intimate areas of personal relations — erotic life, sexuality and sexual preference.

The party's position on this is clearly set out in its program: "The party stands for



complete non-interference of the state and society in sexual matters, so long as nobody is injured or coerced". And what we advocate for society as a whole on this question applies equally within the party. That is, the party does not take a position of approval or disapproval on any specific type of sexual relations or activities, except those involving coercion and violence. We take no position on the merits of homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality or celibacy. We do not advocate one or any of these sexual practices as "better", "purer", "ideologically correct", etc.

Neither do we advocate that comrades or anyone else whose sexual preference is subjected to social discrimination have to "come out", to publicly declare their sexual preference. That decision is a private one.

This does not mean that the party is entirely unconcerned with sexual rights, counselling, health and education services to help overcome the distortions imposed by class society in particular through the institution of the family, on all personal relations and sexuality. This is part of our overall program.

And of course, this doesn't mean that we don't discuss issues of sexuality, of individual psychology, of art, music and literature, of culture, of natural science, within the party — we do. Often they're very lively and contentious discussions. We should all keep abreast of ideological debates that are taking place. But these do not concern the determination of the DSP's political line. To take political positions on many of these questions would undermine the party as a political organisation, unnecessarily narrow its appeal and impede its ability to mobilise as broadly as possible on political questions.

## Sexuality & sexual preference

However, on some issues like sexuality and theories of psychology which are openly or intrinsically based on racist or sexist assumptions and theorising, the party takes positions against such theorising. Overwhelmingly it is the right and consciously reactionary forces that theorise about racial superiority and sexual preference superiority. Fighting against such reactionary positions is the main focus and work that the party has to carry out. However, the party also rejects the position put forward by some sections of the lesbian and gay liberation movements that homosexuality is more progressive, or a superior form of sexuality than heterosexuality, or that ranks sexual practices into a hierarchy of "goodness" or "purity" and therefore "acceptability".

There are three main reasons for opposing this position.

Firstly, the whole area of human sexuality and human psychology is distorted by class society, in which all social interactions are moulded by property relations. This occurs not only in the sphere of economic and political relations but in the sexual sphere as well. The fundamental characteristics of capitalist relations of production

permeate all aspects of human relationships in capitalist society. We will not be able to separate out all the distorting class and other factors until we have established a different kind of society, one based on co-operative and non-exploitative social and economic practices. Until that time, and with greater scientific knowledge, our understanding of the formation of the individual human psyche and sexuality will be severely hampered.

Secondly, there is the basis on which most of these assertions rest. Some may appear to be quite progressive. For example, some gays and lesbians have argued that homosexuality is more progressive than heterosexuality because it involves sexual relations that fall outside the family system, and therefore leads to liberation from that system. But this argument displays a misunderstanding of the nature of the family institution, which is based on economic, not sexual, relations. After all, sexual relations between a man and a woman, whether for pleasure or human reproduction, does not require them to form a family unit, to enter into a legally binding contract and live together in a common household. The family unit is not necessary for sexual relations, but for the division of society into owners and non-owners of the means of material production.

Sexual activities of whatever kind outside the family cannot replace the family *system*. They in no way replace the social functions and economic benefits it provides to capitalism. The family system provides free of charge, primarily through women's unpaid labour, for the reproduction of the next generation of workers, the care of the aged and sick, the care and maintenance of the present generation of workers. As well, the family system provides one of the primary institutions for instilling conservative values in the young.

The family system, and the ideology and morality that buttress it, will wither away only as the social and economic functions it now performs are progressively taken on by society as a whole.

### Separatist arguments

Another example of such sexual preference hierarchy comes from a section of radical feminists in the women's movement who advocate separatism as political practice. They base their explanation of women's oppression on a theory of "patriarchy" which identifies men — both individually and collectively — as the enemy. In this view women are subordinated because of men's manipulation of women's sexuality and their reproductive role, especially through the use of violence and rape as methods of control. The primary oppression of women is then generalised to the creation, by men, of all other divisions and inequalities in human society. Such a viewpoint sees men as having a vested interest in women's oppression. This often leads to the assertion

by some separatists that a “true feminist” is one who does not live or have dealings with a man, advocating the sexual practice of radical celibacy; or in the case of a sector of lesbian separatists, an advocacy of lesbianism.

Much of the theorising that underpins these positions comes back to some biologically causal viewpoint. Superiority of gender or sexual preference is ultimately explained in terms of instinct, inborn drive, genetic trait, pre-set tendency, or some other similar biologically fixed cause.

Obviously, there is a biological basis to differences between the sexes, but in terms of sexual preference this is in no way proved. But the whole point is that biological differences have been used to explain social behavior which differed radically in the course of social evolution.

Biological explanations beg the question: If biology is the cause then there should be no social variation — all women at all times should have behaved in certain fixed ways, so too should men. But clearly this isn't the case.

Biologically based causality can't and doesn't explain the different social behaviors and norms that have been attached to the different sexes in different historically evolved societies. Take the situation of women in capitalist society over the last 100 to 150 years, say in Australia or England or the United States. Women were not considered civil or legal adults (no matter what their age) and stood in a “protected” relationship to their nearest male relative — husband, father, son, etc. In all financial, legal, and even moral relations women were treated as subordinate to men. If they worked, women's wages were judged as a fraction of the male rate because they were considered biologically inferior to males. If they were thought to be valued at half of what a man was valued, then their wage limits were set at half the male rate.

Another example of such “socio-biological” theorising is exhibited by social-Darwinist explanations of gender-role differences as resulting from “evolutionary needs”. Men had to survive in the public arena as competitors, while women were confined to the private sphere in their role as reproducers and guardians of morality. More advanced levels of civilisation were theorised in terms of gender differentiation regarding “sexual instinct”. That is, men had an insatiable sexual urge and women virtually lacked this. Women's asexuality provided the civilising and moralising powers necessary to curb men's animality and lust, to aid men's will to conquer such urges.

Of course, such asexuality only applied to women of the propertied classes; lower-class women and “fallen women” (prostitutes irrespective of class origin) were in general seen as sexual and in some notion “less civilised” and “lower” in the social evolutionary scale — biological throwbacks to an earlier evolutionary period, e.g., one of primitive promiscuity. Thus was the double standard justified.

But while women of the propertied classes were seen as morally superior to men sexually, in every other way they were inferior, more primitive, less evolved and more defined by their biology. Women were unable to escape from the total domination of their reproductive system and thus were non-adults, minors, and treated in all ways as such.

I've recounted this example in some detail because today the position of women in these countries has shifted dramatically. Sexism still exists but the form it takes is much more subtle. Yet no biological explanation will explain the shift in women's social position from "non-adult" to full civil and legal equality in most developed capitalist countries. That shift can only be explained in social and economic terms and in terms of the political struggles that took place at the turn of the century and which continue to take place today.

The party opposes such biological causal theories for any explanation of social phenomena — gender, sexual preference, race, class, etc. They are idealist and usually provide the ideological basis for some of the most reactionary, exploitative and inhuman social practices. For feminists to espouse such a position is to assert an inversion of the same theoretical basis that has kept women as second-class humans during the whole history of class society. To assert "biological superiority" is no different to the old assertion of "biological inferiority" and at the same time reinforces and gives credence to reactionary socio-biological explanations. This also leaves unchallenged the other major ideological bulwark against gender equality — religion, and its creation theories of the intrinsic weakness and moral frailty of women and the danger they pose to the "moral purity" of men.

### **'Lifestyle politics'**

This brings me to the third reason the party does not advocate any form of sexuality. It relates to the whole question of "coming out" and "lifestyle politics" within the gay/lesbian, and to some degree the separatist feminist, movements. In particular, it relates to an interpretation of that slogan "the personal is political" which inverts the original meaning from the notion that much of what you thought were your personal and, in this sense, unique experiences were in fact shaped by social, economic and political forces and constituted systematic discrimination you shared with others, e.g., sexism, racism.

In this inverted form, the shared experience of social oppression is taken back into the personal sphere, i.e., it is personalised into a lifestyle choice. This takes the form of believing one can achieve social liberation through adopting a particular lifestyle. The idea is that the way to escape from oppression and alienation is to build yourself a life

in which the people around you are more sensitive, are of the same gender, etc. Not only is this put forward as the way for individuals to be as happy as possible, but it becomes, by extension, a theory of transforming society. Lifestyle is therefore not only viewed as an escape but as a model for others to emulate.

This “strategy” is not new. It was put into practice several times in the 19th century by utopian socialists, who sought to change society by creating the nucleus of a “model society”, a utopia, which would serve as an example for the rest of society to follow.

It’s easy to understand the immediate appeal of “lifestyle politics” for those people whose sexual choices have been marginalised and criminalised and whose gender has been discriminated against, who want to build a haven to escape the pressures. But what happens is that rather than creating a haven, they create a ghetto in which they abstain from taking up the struggle against the sources of their oppression.

Just as an island of socialism can’t exist in the sea of capitalism, neither can a non-sexist haven exist in the midst of a sexist society. The attempt to create a non-sexist haven in practice leads to making peace with the status quo, with the forces that profit from sexism.

Instead of building alliances with other oppressed sections of society, and participating in the process of building the mass struggle to democratically transform society, “lifestyle politics” can lead to abstention from the movement, thus weakening its potential. Moreover, the struggle against a particular form of oppression is weakened because the ruling class does not retire from society into a “haven”. It continues to work to drive back any gains the movement has made.

So as a strategy for social liberation “lifestyle politics” is shortsighted and in the longer term potentially reactionary.

## Hierarchy of oppression?

There is another dimension to the logic of “lifestyle politics”. This is the notion of a hierarchy of oppression. Often those members of layers and sections of society that have been systematically oppressed will argue that their particular oppression is top of the hierarchy. For example, some feminists will assert that sexism comes first; or some gays will assert that it is homophobia; or some blacks will assert that it is racism; or some trade unionists will assert that it is the economic struggle on the job. The struggles of other oppressed groups are then seen through the prism of the priority of one’s own oppression. This can lead in some situations to a bizarre logic of adding up oppressions to see who is the “most” oppressed, e.g., a black, unemployed, disabled, lesbian, etc.

Obviously for many, their particular experience of racism, sexism, etc., has been

the determining factor in their lives to a greater or lesser extent. It can impel them to organise into movements around their oppression. But to debate or assert a hierarchy of oppression is misleading, divisive and really quite irrelevant. It ignores the real needs of the particular liberation movement.

How do different oppressed social groups make gains in today's society to drive back the discrimination and oppression while at the same time moving towards a more fundamental transformation to rid society of the foundations on which such an oppression is built? Answering this means addressing the nature of class society and how it can be changed. And it means building alliances and strengthening the anti-capitalist movement by taking on board all of the struggles of the oppressed as part of that necessary transformation.

There are many misunderstandings about such a viewpoint. This isn't an abstentionist economic position. This isn't saying "Wait until the workers have made the revolution and then raise your demands". Just the reverse. This is a dynamic of unifying the different struggles against oppression that takes on the tasks of today as well as those in the future. But it is also based on an understanding of what social forces are capable of taking on the ruling capitalist class and winning. That central social force in the struggle to end social oppression is the working class — those whose only means of subsistence is selling their labour power for a wage.

Through their daily experience of exploitation workers can learn that the only way to win a struggle is through co-operative unity in action, overcoming the divisions of race, gender, etc., and the divisions in the labour process between white and blue collar, between skilled and unskilled, etc. That is, in order to defend their class interests workers are impelled to overcome the divisions forged and fostered by the ruling class to weaken the strength of the majority, to divide and rule.

The working class can only defeat the capitalist rulers if it creates a broad fighting alliance that takes up the struggles of all the oppressed and of humanity as a whole, i.e., if it take up questions affecting the very survival of the great majority of people — questions like war, mass poverty and the destruction of the natural environment. It is only through such an alliance that the massive transformational tasks of democratising political and economic life and eradicating the material basis of social oppression can be achieved.

To use the method of hierarchies of oppression is to judge the political through the prism of the personal. Instead of advancing from individual experiences of oppression to an understanding that the particular forms of oppression are a product of social conditions that can only be overcome through the collective political action of all of the oppressed, it impedes and actually erects barriers to the building of such an alliance. It

is fundamentally divisive.

The point is not for oppressed groups to fight among each other for the dubious privilege of being “most oppressed”, but to unite and fight the root cause of their oppression. The hierarchy of oppression analysis does not advance the political consciousness of the individual past the initial awareness of that oppression and often leads to the dead-end of “lifestyle politics”, or it effectively accepts the divisions capitalism fosters among working people, blocking the formation of the unity in struggle among the oppressed and exploited majority. If a woman blames all men for the sexism she experiences, a black person blames all whites for the racism he or she experiences, this becomes a barrier to understanding the social causes of that form of oppression and the need to mobilise the majority to change society. Such subjective blinkers can be totally detrimental to the fight to rid society of the institutions that create oppression.

The strategy of building the broadest anti-capitalist unity in action is the political basis for building our party and for opposing any political strategies and tactics that impede, weaken or divert this process. It is also the basis on which all party members are expected to argue in all movements and struggles.

We have one common program for social liberation and one “class” of membership. We expect *all* our members to take up and fight for *all* of our political positions. We don’t take a sectorial approach to membership, i.e., that only women should campaign against sexism, or that only blacks should take up the struggle against racism. These are issues that the party as a whole campaigns around.

## Sisterhood & comradeship

Where do these phenomena find expression within our own ranks? We know that members join the party with quite different political experiences and quite different levels of consciousness. We also know that we are all affected by the distortions and divisions of class society. We’ve all been subjected to racist, sexist, homophobic ideas and practices. We’ve been affected by such things as competitiveness, intellectual snobbery, selfishness, and the general pettiness, prejudices, self-doubts and guilt engendered by this society.

How do we deal with these? The answer is, simply, that we deal with these disparate and personally different experiences *politically*.

I’d like to outline some negative examples drawn from other movement experiences to highlight our own party practice on these issues. The first of these comes from the feminist movement: the concept of “sisterhood”.

We see sisterhood as the common bond of potential identification that flows from the fact that all women are oppressed as a sex. But, because of the deep class differences

and divisions, because of ethnic and racial differences, and all the other differences between women, it does not mean that all women like each other or feel personally close to each other. Nor does it mean that all women will or should have the same opinion or political awareness, that consensus is “natural” to women.

Such a view of sisterhood has been quite a barrier at times within the women’s liberation movement, exerting a moral pressure to uniformity to one sectorial experience. The idea has been promoted that to have political differences and debates is to be somehow “unsisterly”. Or there is a hesitancy about forming political coalitions and alliances with women you cannot personally identify with. Such positions have led to perceptions by working women in manual and clerical jobs, by women of color, or of non-Anglo ethnicity, or by women of different age groupings that the women’s movement has no relevance to them.

But the political concept of sisterhood is a real and powerful thing, if the potential of common oppression of all women is made conscious and alliances constructed. Sisterhood isn’t cosy friendship. All women are potential sisters in oppression, but it will be by their actions and struggle to overcome that oppression that such a potential is realised. Maggie Thatcher is not a “token male” as some who support the friendship notion of sisterhood proclaim. Maggie Thatcher actively promotes anti-women, anti-working class and racist policies. She has consciously aligned herself with the enemy as an individual woman. Such political choices are inevitable among women, precisely because class interests can cut across their interests as a member of the oppressed sex.

The task of the movement and the task of the party is to promote united action by women, no matter what class they are part of, against the manifestations and institutional sources of their common oppression.

Now I use the example of sisterhood because in limited ways there are parallels with the concept of “comradeship”. Clearly, a major difference is that comradeship is based on the conscious solidarity that comes from actively participating in a political organisation with a common political aim and strategy. We join the party because we agree with its basic aims and the strategy it has adopted to achieve those aims. Within that framework there is latitude for different assessments within the party about the concrete political situation, the tactics needed to implement our strategy in the given situation, etc.

But there are points of similarity with the sisterhood notion. Comradeship is not the same as friendship. It too is a political concept and rests on an awareness of the oppressive nature of class society and the need to take up the fight against such oppression. That is the basis of our program and our active participation in the struggles of different oppressed groups.



We recognise that it is impossible to eradicate racism, sexism, etc., within the party and somehow transform comrades into “pure” and unsullied individuals. What we seek to develop is a consciousness of such oppressions, an understanding of their origin in the social structure of class society, and an agreed commitment to struggle to eradicate the basis of such oppressions. And we do so in a very positive manner to which I’ll return shortly.

### The ‘guilt-fix’ method

But firstly, by contrast, I want to illustrate how the party doesn’t operate. This is what I call the “guilt-fix” method. This is the method where organisations either adopt, or are challenged to adopt, the notion that their members should cleanse themselves from the sins of racism and/or sexism, for example. This cleansing process may take the form of confessionals, or self-criticism.

This approach has many parallels with the Stalinist method of “criticism and self-criticism” which is a form of self-confession. Usually the method works by one or more “leaders” taking upon themselves the role of true interpreters of what actions are deemed sins and demanding confessions from those who violate these standards.

When such an approach is adopted the organisation turns in on itself, pitting member against member in a constant battle of accusation and confession. Moreover, such a method is totally counterproductive to dealing with the question under consideration. What kind of self-confidence can new members achieve if every time they open their mouths they are denounced as a racist or a male chauvinist? What kind of political education can new members receive if doling out guilt is the major activity of the organisation? At the heart of such a method is the notion that the personal salvation of each member is necessary to make the party into the instrument for forging fundamental social change. Instead of educating members on the material roots of oppression and how it can be eliminated, the “guilt fix” method tries to make people feel guilty about themselves and their past. In the end, this method rests on the liberal assumption that oppression and discrimination are the result of individual prejudices, rather than social institutions.

The “guilt-fix” method often leads to uncritical acceptance of others’ judgment of “sin” and their definition of how to personally take on a burden which is in fact social in origin and nature. Such a method transforms potential social movements into personal navel-gazing clubs. This method of sin, guilt, and confession has been the linchpin of Christianity and has provided a very successful method of ideological control in “Western civilisation”. Liberals have simply secularised it.

Our method is radically different. We try to educate our members to understand

the *social causes* of oppression and the *political solution* to it. The important thing is not what a comrade thinks or whether their mind is “pure” (which in a society based on oppression and permeated by oppressive ideas is an idealist fantasy), but how they act. Through political education the party seeks to raise the consciousness of all of its members about all forms of social oppression and thus act against all manifestations of such oppression.

Of course, by such an educative method the party expects members to become aware of how racism, sexism, etc., manifest themselves in the personal relations between comrades and to try to change obvious racist and sexist practices, for example, in their behavior and language. We do this by explaining how such practices operate to undermine and destroy the political unity and mutual confidence that a revolutionary party needs if it is to function as a collaborative team.

Moreover, the party is well aware of the burdens and distortions of confidence that members bring into the party through racism, sexism, class experience, etc. So the party takes steps to encourage its members to overcome the effects of such experience on their political activity — to take on tasks which they have been socialised by their oppression to think are not for them. This is through encouragement, education, thinking out ways for each comrade to broaden their experiences, etc. We encourage a team effort and seek to counter the individual competitiveness that capitalism fosters.

## Developing women as political leaders

Let me give an example of how we try to overcome the political effects of sexism on women comrades. One major socialisation for women is that they shouldn't assume leadership tasks. We are taught to fear the consequences of attempting to lead; that such a course will mean loneliness and personal rejection. We are conditioned to play a supportive role in the family, conditioning that is mirrored in the types of service jobs that are the experience of most women in paid employment. This socialisation of support and service to others, to men and to children, is summarised in the saying that “behind every successful man is a woman”.

Given this socialisation, it is thus harder for women to become confident political leaders. And it is hard for men, who have been socialised to expect women to play a submissive, supportive role, to accept women as leaders.

The party plays a very conscious role in trying to overcome both sexist effects. We adopt what might be called an attitude of affirmative action to develop women (and members who are subject to any particular form of institutionalised discrimination) as leaders within the party's leadership team.

The anti-leadership socialisation women are subjected to isn't trivial and easily

overcome. In the party we attempt to create the conditions to help women overcome the sexist barriers to leadership positions. But of course there is no iron-clad guarantee. We can't create a non-sexist utopia within the party. We operate within a society in which sexist stereotyping is institutionalised.

The more this institutional stereotyping is broken down through women gaining access to “non-traditional” jobs and through the socialisation of domestic work, the easier it becomes to counter the internalised conditioning women are subjected to. But such conditioning is very real and powerful, and there is no quick organisational fix to such a problem.

The first step in overcoming the problem is to be very clear about the obstacles we face. The second step is to realise that the party alone cannot overcome the problems by itself. Each individual woman has to see this as a personal challenge. Whatever the party does collectively to help educate and maximise political development of every individual, at a certain point there is only one thing that makes the difference — our own determination to educate ourselves, to take on tasks that we feel unconfident about, and to use the team back-up to build both competence and confidence.

Education isn't just about reading and studying. Education comes through the living experiences we go through in the class struggle and how we respond to them. Each individual has to be prepared to put themselves on the line in such a process. Each comrade has to make time to read and study; to think out how to meet the challenges; not hide behind our “feminine” conditioning, or use it as an excuse for not taking up the struggle. So it's a personal challenge. And it's one that is harder for women to do. That's the reality, that's the historical fact of life in class society today.

### **Why we reject quotas & women's caucuses in the party**

But does that mean that we think the standards of leadership for women should be less than for men? Should we lower the definition of leadership qualifications for women? Should we create an organisational mechanism to compensate for the difficulties of developing women as party leaders, e.g., set quotas for the number of women on the party's leadership bodies?

In examining the question of quotas it is useful to point out that there is a fundamental difference between the party and other organisations. The essential difference is the political basis of the party, reflected in its program and its method of organisation, i.e., the party is committed to fighting against the oppression of women and is democratically organised.

While we may advocate the use of quotas, at least in part, in some situations in the mass movements, we reject this method within the party. It's not an effective way of

dealing with the situation and we are more successful in doing it in another way.

We reject the quota method within the party because it tends to perpetuate the problem. There is a danger that it will trivialise women and their role in the party; will reinforce their view of themselves, and men's view of them, as second-class citizens needing special conditions and privileges. It does not deal politically with the fundamental problem of sexism. And of course it can be insulting, patronising and degrading to women in the party.

Moreover, we don't think that a quota system works in the kind of political organisation that we are. It is number fiddling. It could allow the party to avoid taking up the question of how to collectively deal with the effects of sexism.

Nor do we see women leaders as only the leaders of women in the party. Women who are elected to our leadership bodies are leaders of the party as a whole, not a section of the party. They lead in branches, in fractions, in committees of the party. Any other view would trivialise the political importance of dealing with sexism.

The party has one program for all its members and one class of membership. We don't ghettoise particular struggles and sections of members. We expect all members to actively promote all aspects of our program, not just sectional aspects. And the party as a whole takes on the responsibility to assist and encourage women to overcome the particular obstacles they face to becoming rounded political leaders. The same applies to those comrades who are victims of racism.

The same distinction between the party and other organisations applies to the way we organise ourselves. In the trade unions, for example, we support the formation of separate caucuses to help women develop both the policies to overcome the specifics of their oppression and the confidence to take these policies into the official union bodies and fight for their inclusion as major parts of the union's aims. We support women's caucuses within trade unions because (a) these are organisations in which membership is not based on acceptance of an anti-capitalist political program (including opposition to sexism), and (b) because they are dominated by bureaucratic functionaries who base themselves on the sectoral interests of the most privileged workers rather than the class interests of all their members.

But within the party we don't organise sectorally because politically we have integrated such struggles into our program and educated all our members to fight against such oppression.

We have found that the best way to organise internally is around the type of task that we're currently engaged in. So if we are politically intervening in the peace movement we organise a fraction of all those who are intervening and politically leading this area of work. If we organise a women's liberation fraction we will organise on the same

basis, i.e., including all those comrades carrying out and politically leading the particular struggle we are engaged in, regardless of gender. We organise around our activity, not around the divisions fostered within the working class by capitalism.

Such intervention-based fractions are quite different from exclusive caucuses based on sex, race, or any similar non-political criteria.

We have found that such caucuses tend to be both undemocratic and counterproductive methods of organisation within the party. The experience of other revolutionary parties which have set up, for example, women's caucuses or women's collectives have reinforced our view that such a method is not effective in combating sexism.

Sexism within the party, or a lack of commitment to raising the fight against women's oppression, is a political problem for the party as a whole, and the leadership of the party in particular. It has to be dealt with as a political question not marginalised or swept under the carpet as "women's business".

And without being complacent, by using these political criteria for dealing with specific disadvantages among our membership we have developed many strong women leaders in the party who are party leaders in their own right, not token or second-level leaders who only concern themselves with secondary questions while the "real decisions" are taken by the men.

I think our party has been more successful than any other left party in Australia, and many revolutionary organisations around the world, in attracting women into the party and training them to take up leadership responsibilities.

## **A political, not a welfare, organisation**

Such political methods of dealing with problems apply to all areas of our work. We know that as a party we can't compensate for society. Disadvantage and oppression are fundamental to class society. The purpose of the party is to eradicate such oppression by changing the nature of society. That means political activity and training. That is the responsibility of the party to its members. And, similarly, such political responsibility to the party, to building it and its influence, is what each member as an individual takes on when she/he joins.

The party is not, and cannot be, an organisation to compensate for the horrors of class society. We are not a welfare association. We cannot provide a socialist haven, a utopia, as a refuge to protect our membership from the problems created by the capitalist system. We can only prepare our members politically to help fight to overcome such a system.

And this relates to how we see the relationship between the party and the individual

member. The party asks members for political commitment and activity. We don't ask members to personally compensate for other members' unjust situation. For example, we don't ask members with higher wages to give money to other comrades on lower wages so as to "equalise" incomes within the party. Of course, we ask comrades to financially support the party in accordance with their financial situation, but that is an entirely different question based on the political necessity of financing the tasks and basic functioning of the party.

Nor do we expect members to personally equalise the burdens imposed by society on other members — the care of the elderly and sick, the care of children, etc. That would transform the party into a welfare body not a political body. And again, that doesn't mean that we don't take into account such personal responsibilities individual comrades may have. Political tasks and contributions by individual members have to be seen in the context of their individual responsibilities.

However, it may often seem confusing to members at first glance that many of the political demands that we raise in our political activity, in the mass movements, in the trade unions, on the job, etc, are tasks which the party does not and cannot take on itself. The whole point of such struggles is to make society as a whole take up these questions and assume these responsibilities. Fundamental to this is building consciousness in the mass movements to raise these demands as basic to the kind of future society that we are fighting to construct.

This discussion between the relationship of the personal and the political in the party is always a timely one. It is very useful when new members are joined up to run over such ideas that might be taken for granted by longer term members. It is especially timely at a time when there are attacks on socialist organisation. We should be confident that these ideas are the best ones we can think out at the moment, the best ones we know from practice, and the ones designed to meet the collective needs of people coming from very different backgrounds. In this way we develop the party framework for working together as a stable team. ■

# On Joining New Members to the Party

*By Doug Lorimer*

Our aim is to build what the program of the Democratic Socialist Party defines as a “politically homogeneous campaign party”, i.e., a revolutionary activist organisation that carries out its tasks in a united and coherent way. Our ability to function in this way rests on the fact that we are all in fundamental agreement with the party’s aims and its strategy (as codified in its program) and that we all abide by the basic principle of majority rule, i.e., that all members seek to the best of their ability to carry out the decisions of the majority of the membership and of the elected leadership bodies of the party.

In order to function as a politically homogeneous campaign party, we require that applicants for membership meet certain criteria. These are set down in the party’s constitution — agreement with the party’s aims, which include acceptance of the party’s program as the basis for their attainment; agreement to abide by the party’s rules as codified in the constitution; and a willingness to engage to the best of their ability in the work of the party. Only those who meet these criteria are eligible for admission to membership of the party. This, however, *does not mean* that anyone who meets these criteria is *automatically entitled to be admitted to party membership*. These are the criteria to be used by a branch in judging *if* an application for membership is worthy of being *considered* for admission to membership.

On what basis should a branch decide if an applicant who meets these criteria should be *admitted as a member*? There is and should be only one basis: *Will the applicant’s admission to party membership contribute to building the party?*

Deciding whether or not to admit someone to membership in the Democratic Socialist Party is one of the most important political decisions branches make. Each

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The following is an excerpt from a report adopted by the DSP National Executive on October 13, 1990.

time a branch acts on a membership application it carries the responsibility of upholding and defending the political and organisational concepts of the party. It is not a decision that should be taken lightly and without an informed assessment of whether or not the applicant will contribute to building the party.

While the basis for determining membership must be political, i.e., will the applicant's admission advance the process of building a revolutionary cadre organisation, there is, obviously, no fixed measuring stick for judging this. For example, the measure of an applicant's agreement with the party's aims obviously depends on how well they understand those aims.

Similarly, agreement to abide by the party's constitution depends on how well the applicant understands the party's basic organisational principles and its rules of functioning. The branch has to decide if the applicant's understanding of the party's aims and its organisational rules and norms is sufficient to warrant admission to party membership.

Again, there is no fixed measure by which to judge whether a person is willing to engage to the best of their ability in the work of the party. Intent is certainly essential. But that's not always sufficient. The branch must weigh whether or not the applicant can and is willing to do so to a degree that justifies admission to the party.

In sum, each application for admission to party membership must be determined concretely. In some instances the party will decide that someone with significant political disagreements on particular questions will make a contribution to building the party that outweighs the disagreements, particularly if there is the prospect that political discussion within the framework of common activity will eliminate the difference. In other cases, an application might be rejected because differing views would prove incompatible with successful integration into the party.

It should be noted that the criteria for determining who should *become* a member are more stringent than determining who should *remain* a member. To safeguard the democratic rights of party members, we have developed clear standards regarding what constitutes the basis for ending someone's party membership. As a result, within the framework of clearly defined obligations set down in the party's constitution, the development of political differences is permitted. And despite our view of what membership should mean in terms of activity, that is, *engaging to the best of one's ability in the work of the party*, people sometimes remain in the party for an entire period even though their involvement in the party's work has declined to the minimum requirement set in the constitution, i.e., simply remaining current with their membership dues.

However, pointing to the presence of individuals within the party who *only* fulfil



the minimum requirements to *remain* members cannot be used to justify joining up someone with similar limitations of activity.

This also applies to an applicant's political views and the extent to which they are in harmony with those of the party. That is, the fact that they may have disagreements with the party's political positions which are also held by a minority in the party does not justify discounting those differences in considering whether they should be admitted to party membership. In the case of someone with particular political differences, it also means making an assessment of their capacity to recruit others to the party not on the basis of their particular views, but strictly on the basis of the party's program and policies.

Additionally, in acting on an application for membership the branch has both the right and the responsibility to consider the mental stability of the person involved. While we are not interested in any more than we need to know about an individual in a personal sense, insofar as it may affect a person's capacity to function in the organisation we have to be concerned with their personal ability to act in a self-disciplined manner, their ability to work with others, to become part of our disciplined party team.

Similarly, it is entirely legitimate for the branch to consider an applicant's mode of personal conduct. In seeking to build a revolutionary working-class party that is able to stand up to the pressures of bourgeois society, we have a big job in combating false ideas and deep-going prejudices generated by capitalism, such as overtly sexist views and behavior.

The purpose of the category of provisional membership is not only to enable an applicant to get a better idea of the party's politics and organisational rules and methods, and for the branch to provide them with an organised program of education in our basic concepts. It is also intended to enable the party to be in a better position to judge whether an applicant's personal outlook and conduct is compatible with our political views and with the standards of behavior we think are essential to build a disciplined team of socialist activists.

A number of specific points on provisional membership.

First of all, it should be remembered that provisional members are *not* members of the party. They are *applicants for membership*.

Secondly, they are required to fulfill *all the obligations of membership* set down in the party's constitution, including the payment of dues and any special levies. However, they do not have any of the normal constitutional rights of a member. In particular, they cannot move motions or vote at party meetings; nominate or be nominated as candidates for election to leadership bodies of the party, including delegated conferences; elect, or be elected to, leadership bodies of the party; or submit written contributions

to the party's internal discussion bulletin.

Thirdly, provisional members are required to familiarise themselves with the party's program, constitution, norms and methods of functioning and it is the responsibility of the branches to organise such an education process for their provisional members.

Fourthly, branch executives may admit people to provisional membership, subject to ratification by the next branch general meeting, but provisional membership status can be withdrawn at *any time* by the branch executive.

Fifthly, an application for party membership cannot be considered by a branch unless the applicant has been a provisional member for *at least a period of three months* prior to the branch general meeting that considers their application for membership. If no action is taken at the end of the *maximum period of provisional membership*, i.e., after six months, the applicant's status as a provisional members shall *automatically* lapse.

Finally, former members may only be readmitted to party membership by a national party body, that is, their applications must be submitted to the National Office.



We know that there are many people who agree with a lot of our ideas but who, for one reason or another, are not convinced that they should devote their energies, their lives, to building a revolutionary socialist party, or are not prepared at this time to shoulder the responsibilities that party membership entails. For many people who sympathise with our aims it will take big changes in the objective political situation to convince them to become party members.

Such people should be encouraged to maintain some level of contact and activity with the party, to subscribe to the party's journals, to attend our forums and fund-raising events, and to collaborate with our comrades in whatever area of political activity they are involved in.

Building a network of contacts and sympathisers — people who regularly read our press, who come to one or another public party function, who regularly contribute money to our fund drives, who work with us in one or another political campaign — is a part of the process of building the party. Such a network is not only necessary to our work today, but to our ability to grow in the future as the unfolding class struggle convinces many more people of the need to become active militants in a revolutionary party. ■

# The Structure & Functioning of Branch Leaderships

*By Chris Spindler*

Ever since Marx wrote that “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it”, working-class political activists have debated, discussed, split over, floundered, and at times found some agreement over the structure and functioning of organisations in an attempt to fulfil Marx’s thesis.

From around that time to the present it is possible to trace the development of two different conceptions of revolutionary socialist organisation. One conception, which was dominant before World War I, was that a socialist party should seek to include within its ranks all those who identified themselves as socialists. This conception — the “all-inclusive” party — inevitably led to a party that was composed of diverse elements with conflicting programs, and which fell under the control of middle-class reformists.

A different conception was developed by Lenin in Russia. Lenin believed that in order to succeed in carrying out a socialist revolution the workers needed a party of professional revolutionists, a party made up of the class-conscious vanguard of the working class. Lenin set out to construct such a party.

The experience of World War I and the revolutionary wave that followed it in Europe put these two conceptions of the socialist party to a decisive historical test. The “all-inclusive” parties not only revealed themselves as utterly inadequate instruments for organising and leading a proletarian revolution; they proved to be the most effective political instruments at the service of the capitalist rulers for *suppressing* the upsurge of labour radicalism. The Bolshevik Party in Russia, which had been built around Lenin’s conception of a revolutionary vanguard party, stood firm in the face of imperialist reaction and went on to become the organiser and leader of the first successful

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proletarian revolution.

## Conscious approach to party-building

James P. Cannon — one of the founders of the US Communist Party and, after its Stalinisation, the founding leader of the American Trotskyist movement — summarised the lessons of the Bolshevik experience in building a revolutionary workers' party in a speech he gave on the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution. Cannon noted:

Marxism teaches that the revolution against capitalism and the socialist reconstruction of the old world can be accomplished only through conscious, collective action by the workers themselves. The vanguard party is the highest expression and irreplaceable instrument of that class consciousness at all stages of the world revolutionary process...

In the same passage Cannon goes on to explain the role of the vanguard party at different stages of the revolutionary process. In the period before the revolution it prepares the workers' vanguard for a revolutionary struggle for power by assembling and training the revolutionary cadres — the professional organisers, propagandists, agitators of the revolutionary workers' movement. These cadres may only represent but a small section of the class but aim to maintain links with the mass working class movement at all times. Then during the period of mass upsurge the vanguard party comes to the fore to lead the workers' struggle for power. After the overthrowing of the old rulers, the vanguard party must again lead in the construction of a new society.

Cannon argued that a “political organisation capable of handling such colossal tasks cannot arise spontaneously or haphazardly; it has to be continuously, consistently and consciously built”.

He concluded that it “is not only foolish but fatal to take a lackadaisical attitude toward party building or its problems”.

## Part of our history

Cannon based these conclusions not only on the successful example provided by the Bolsheviks but also on the defeats resulting from the failure of revolutionists in other countries to assimilate and apply Lenin's theory of the party.

We too have studied and restudied the party question. Our history and the fact that we are still capable of creating a history are testament to the importance we place on party building. From our earliest days the seriousness with which we approached the question was quite clear.

The first faction fight conducted by our tendency was over basic questions of organisation. As John Percy put it in the pamphlet *A History of the Democratic Socialist Party: The First Two Decades*:

We developed our party-building orientation through a major internal struggle in Resistance...It was a fight fought over some very basic questions, seemingly obvious today. But they are vital issues. The fierceness of this fight meant we learned some of these party-building lessons well. They are ingrained in our history, our experience...

We learned to lead. We learned to forge a team in struggle for our ideas.

That fight in Resistance was over three basic principles...

1. The politics and program of the organisation should be the property of all, that is, it should be democratically decided on by the whole membership.
2. You needed to elect a leadership, not rely on individuals with the loudest voice, stars, or a self appointed leading clique.
3. You have to take the question of organisation itself and the finances for that organisation very seriously.

Of course these struggles had a real political basis to them as well. Those who wanted to really make a revolution fought for an organisation fit to organise and lead a revolution. The differences over organisational questions were a reflection of difference over political perspectives.

So the way we organise ourselves reflects our political aims. It's not our organisational form that makes us a revolutionary socialist party but our politics. Our organisational form is simply the tool by which we structure our party to best facilitate the achievement of our political goals.

### Our organisational principles

Even a cursory glance through the party's constitution would indicate what we think are the important elements in our method of organisation.

The orientation to youth is there. So is the importance of being active, of loyalty to the party and the method of discussion, decision-making and testing out our decisions. Comrades should go back and have a read of the party constitution, including the preamble.

The preamble to the DSP's constitution clearly sets out the reasons why we organise ourselves in the way that we do. The term democratic centralism sums up our conception of party organisation. The preamble to the party constitution explains that "at the heart of this concept is the democratic principle of majority rule: all members of the party, both in their public political activity and in their participation in the internal life of the party, are required to abide by the decisions of the party, as determined by majority vote".

This then is our general framework. This is our general approach for all our bodies no matter what different particular functions they carry out.

So, we reach decisions to act — this is the purpose of internal discussions and decisions. Once a decision has been made by majority vote all members are required to loyally implement it. Halfheartedly implemented views do not obviously have the test of practice. So democracy means not only guarding the right to argue for minority views but also for the majority to have its views implemented.

The preamble also points out the centrality of creating an experienced party leadership which works together as a team and has the confidence of the party's membership. "The value of a leadership team", it explains, "derives from the same source as the value of having a revolutionary party — the superiority of collective experience, discussion, decision, and action over the isolated efforts of unorganised individuals. Without such a leadership team a revolutionary party cannot play its essential role of providing leadership to the working people in their struggle to conquer power and build socialism."

One of the key functions of democratic centralism is to make possible the development of such a leadership team which in turn helps the development of the revolutionary party as the leadership of the working class.

Cooperation and collectivism are essential to our organisation, because we cannot build the type of organisation we strive for without it. They are reflected in our method of functioning — in the procedures of democratic discussion, majority decision-making and unity in action. They are reflected in our emphasis on team building, helping others to lead, and finding satisfaction in the success of our collective efforts.

No one person can hope to substitute for the efforts of a branch, an executive, a fraction — in fact it's the antithesis of how we work. Furthermore, leadership in our party revolves around the ability to organise and develop teams, not only to carry out our tasks but to train others to lead teams.

How can this be facilitated through our structures? Or, to put it another way, what can we do to make our structures fulfil our party-building goals? Because while we know we've got the formal structures we still have to make them work. That is, it isn't automatic that you will have a well-functioning team even though the structures are in place.

## The role of the branch executive

Let's begin with the branch executive. The role of the executive is to be the political leadership of the branch. It has been elected to lead. As set out in the constitution, the responsibilities of the executive are ensuring the decisions of branch meetings get implemented, that branch meetings are convened and that the business for each branch general meeting is prepared, and that the work of the branch is directed between each

branch meeting.

Clearly from this the executive is responsible to the branch and has the responsibility of organising the branch. But what does it really mean to be the political leadership in the branch?

The branch leadership is the key element in planning branch activity. Branch executives have to decide what projects to undertake and what projects we should not undertake. Executives have to decide this in relation to the resources and other factors that are present in each branch.

At times branches or branch executives tend to take on more than they are capable of. This is understandable given our very great desire to see our movement succeed and for the party and Resistance to overcome the difficulties faced in being a relatively small size with increasing responsibilities.

This is particularly why we have national discussions and decisions about what priorities are to take precedence over others. We are a national organisation and our work has most impact when reflected nationally. So we decide at national conferences and on national leadership bodies a national framework for branches and branch leaderships.

For example, writing for and selling *Green Left Weekly* is clearly a priority for us. Along with other propaganda work such as forums, educational work, leaflets, interventions, recruiting work and a more conscious approach to work between Resistance and the DSP and some campaigning aspects of international solidarity.

In drawing up a division of labour — which is one of the responsibilities of the executive — the executive should first work out a proposal for the priority assignments to ensure that these tasks get done. This will give a view of what resources are available for other projects.

However, making the executive function as a leadership team can be hampered if we are unclear about the respective responsibilities of the branch executive, the branch secretary and the branch fulltimers.

Executives at times can fall into the trap of being just a coalition of leaders, that is, a collection of comrades heading up different assignments. The result of this can be for executive comrades to then not have the time to do the work of the whole executive — that is, have responsibility for the development of the branch as a whole.

Those comrades on executives not only need to be seen to be leading politically important areas of work, but also need to be thinking through the general direction of the branch as a whole. This is not simply the responsibility of the branch secretary, the branch's chief executive officer. In fact, the primary responsibility of the branch secretary is to weld the executive into a team, with a clear and workable division of labour. The

branch secretary also needs to take the time to have discussions with other executive comrades to develop the political collaboration necessary to build the leadership team.

It is the responsibility of the executive as a whole to organise the branch. At times executives have lost sight of this and the mistaken view has developed that this is the responsibility of the branch fulltimer or fulltimers. Getting things done, tidying, spotting and correcting all mistakes, etc., in effect organising the branch, can fall too much on the branch fulltimer or fulltimers. These comrades, the so-called “branch organiser/s”, are not the organiser/s of the branch. The fulltimer/s are simply that — fulltime staff working for the executive. Their particular responsibilities are determined by the assignments they are given by the executive.

Essential to the concept of team leadership is the notion of collective responsibility in leading our work. This means the executive takes collective responsibility for overseeing the work of the branch.

When difficulties arise we sometimes look for individuals to solve the problems rather than a team of comrades. Or perhaps look for a subjective rather than a political approach to a problem.

That is, we can adopt a critical, self-critical or ultra-critical approach rather than thinking through as a leadership team the best way to solve any particular problems the branch may face.

The point is there must be a political assessment of any problems and how to solve them. It's only in that framework that we can actually learn from our mistakes and move ahead as an organisation and even individually.

This approach also puts us in a much healthier framework. It's looking forward, developing comrades and the team rather than apportioning blame. That is, the team is everything, an all-round cadre champion doesn't really exist. To think otherwise puts enormous strain on individuals to live up to an unachievable image when our task is already ambitious enough.

Of course, the idea of the great individual is a familiar theme in the bourgeois world where the all-round champions get plenty of material reward for being such a high individual achiever. This was also a theme among the Stalinised bureaucrats. They consciously promoted themselves as the all-round cadre champions — they too received material reward for their performance, though not quite in the same league as all-round champions in the capitalist world. They also promoted Lenin as such an individual achiever, glossing over the fact that Lenin's achievements were the result of his having built a team of leaders. Lenin may have played a decisive role in the Russian Revolution but he didn't, and couldn't, do it all by himself.

What about individual achievers in our movement? Well, there are no material



rewards here. Moreover, we reject the view that any particular individual is indispensable. Of course, we value every single comrade's contribution to building the party. But we strive to create an organisation which is not *dependent* on any one comrade's contribution. We consciously work to minimise our dependence upon the talents of any particular individual by building team leaderships, by collectivising experiences and skills.

Now I don't want to give the impression that I'm against comrades striving to improve themselves and being ambitious, far from it. Or thinking that the proverbial collective will look after things for us because it won't. Just that we'll move ahead together or not at all — no individual can substitute for the collective.

## Executive meetings

A few other points on executives and executive functioning.

Firstly, the overall work of the branch has to be adjusted to allow the executive to function. That is, the weighing up of new political openings, making considered projections on projects and campaigns, as well as a considered division of labour are essential tasks for an executive — and these discussions take time. We need to consciously plan the discussions on executives that do weigh up the political openings for us.

We need to ensure that the executive meetings are political affairs. It is easy at times to slip into an administrative approach to organising the branch — but there needs to be a conscious approach to lifting the political atmosphere in meetings.

Many reports can be used to lift the political discussion. What copy for *Green Left* is appropriate this week? What are the mass work openings? What reports and proposals should be submitted for discussion and vote by the branch general meeting?

That is, executive members have an overall responsibility — not just a responsibility for their own assignments. Executive members cannot be protective of assignments. They need to be flexible, that is able to change assignments at the drop of a hat.

In more straightforward terms this means there shouldn't need to be a negotiation process over assignments/tasks. Executive members should be willing to take on whatever is necessary for building the organisation.

That the executive is the political leadership of the branch becomes clear when we look at the role of working comrades. Working comrades clearly do not have the same opportunity to be around during the day as the fulltimers or university students. However this is only one aspect of a leading comrade's role. If a comrade is elected to an executive it is generally because the branch membership has confidence in their political judgment and other leadership capabilities — not because they are in the

office all the time.

If this was the case — if we did only elect those who hung out in the office — leadership in the party or Resistance would quickly degenerate into a lifestyle criteria. Being unemployed would become a virtue. We want comrades to get jobs. This should be seen as an important political contribution, not just through increased pledges but also in the breadth of our political work.

“Running on an assignment” alone is not enough to be seen as leading an area of work. Rather, it is the ability to make correct political judgments of what to do next that defines leadership.

The executive also has a function as a training body; perhaps more so in Resistance than in the party. But this is certainly not the primary function of a branch executive, which is to provide collective political leadership for the branch.

The role of an executive as a training body can't be separated from the overall role of the executive. Training and education is not an abstract concept — it can't be separated out from the normal functioning of an executive. The best thing that can happen for training through an executive is to have the executive functioning well as the political leadership of the branch.

There should be a similar approach to team building. The best are those who are mindful that they are also being trained, that they are also part of the team.

A team builder isn't someone who talks as if they're building teams of others, but are in some way separate from the process themselves, someone who exclaims from on high that we need to so desperately build teams without seeing themselves as part of that process.

A few other quick points about executive meetings that are also applicable to branch and fraction meetings:

l Planning for executive meetings is all important. Branch secretaries should discuss through reports and proposals with those comrades giving reports.

l Every executive member should be thinking through what are we actually deciding, what are we getting out of this particular report. Think through what should be discussed and what is needed before an executive. Don't leave it just to the branch secretary to plan.

l Executive decisions are what matter not the informal discussions between meetings. Informal discussions are just that — they play no part in our formal decision-making structure because it would cut across the elected leadership's ability to take decisions. Of course this doesn't mean that informal discussion among executive members is not important. It just means that it can't and shouldn't be substituted for the formal, democratic, discussions of executive meetings. It is through the formal meetings of our

leadership bodies that we most fully develop team leaderships as collective thinking machines.

Also personal friendships or enmities have to be put aside on executives, as do hard days at work, etc. Executive meetings are times to put your emotions in neutral. Everyone on the executive ought to have a concrete assignment or assignments. That is, assignments should be clear. Regular reports on those assignments should be given to both executive and branch meetings. Where possible some balance in tasks or assignments between mass work and internal assignments should be arranged, and with a mix of comrades.

These are just a few ideas about organising an executive. As the needs of any leadership team varies from place to place and time to time, it's impossible to be too conclusive about the topic.

### **Branch meetings, fractions & working committees**

What about the executive's relationship to other branch bodies? As has been stated, the executive is the political leadership of the branch in between branch meetings. But the executive is not the decision maker for the branch. It ought to put forward concrete proposals for action to the branch. Clearly, the branch needs to know that it is making a decision — the proposal has to be clear. But branch general meetings should not be rubber stamps for executive decisions. All the executive reports to a branch meeting are proposals for the branch membership as a whole to discuss, endorse, amend, or reject.

The executive needs to plan how to get life into the branch meetings. More life in a branch meeting doesn't mean less planning by the executive. It generally means more planning — thinking through contributions, listening to others, making further suggestions, helping others with contributions.

One of the best reports I've heard in a branch meeting which helped to do that was a report on our Latin American solidarity work. The report was 80% political background on the political situation in Latin America with the other 20% some proposals for action on the branch's solidarity work.

The executive had discussed beforehand the framework for the political section and decided on the proposals for action. The Latin American solidarity fraction then was to look at carrying out our work — particularly intervening in CISLAC and the ACFS at the time.

What is the role of fractions? Fractions are bodies where we plan our detailed interventions in the trade unions and other social movement activities, where concrete discussions can take place on how we are going to implement the decisions we took at

the branch meeting.

It's in the context of the overall functioning of fractions that they should be seen as training bodies. The best method of training for comrades to function as Marxist cadres in any mass campaign or movements is a well-functioning fraction.

Fractions generally don't set the political framework for our work, unless the executive or branch meeting decides that should be the case. Our overall political line and perspectives for any area of branch work is set through the collective discussion and decision of the branch meeting or the executive to which the branch has delegated its authority. This method of functioning is not only vital to continuously strengthening the homogeneity of political experience within the branch, but to ensuring that the fraction is able to carry out its central function — helping to build the party branch. Fractions are organs of the party for carrying out our party-building work in the mass movement. They are organisational tools that we use to build the party.

For the branch or the executive to make decisions about the general line of action that a fraction should implement requires that the fractions regularly inform the branch or branch executive about the situation in their area of work and make suggestions about how to advance the party's influence in that area.

The best political leaders listen to what is going on, what activists are experiencing — drawing conclusions from that. There is a very real relationship between fractions and the executive or the branch as a whole. It isn't a one way street; there has to be dialogue and exchange of ideas.

## Relationship between DSP & Resistance branches

The party branch and the executive it elects has the right and the responsibility to organise and direct the political work of *all* the members of the party branch, including branch members who are in Resistance. Party members are assigned to work in Resistance to *build Resistance*. Party members who are in Resistance and who have been elected to Resistance's leadership bodies have the responsibility to lead Resistance. A Resistance branch executive has the authority and responsibility to organise and direct the work of all the Resistance branch members, including those Resistance branch members who are members of the party. But this does not in and of itself make those party members elected by a Resistance branch to a Resistance branch executive, leaders of their party branch with the sole authority to decide what orientation, tactics and activities party members will carry out in any area of movement work, for example, in the student movement. It is the right and responsibility of party branch bodies to make these decisions.

Party members working in Resistance have to be conscious that their primary

loyalty and responsibility is to the party, and that they have an obligation to convince the rest of their party comrades of any significant proposals they may have for any area of our work before they raise such proposals in any non-party bodies, including in Resistance bodies.

That said there are a number of points to make regarding the relationship between the party and the youth organisation.

Firstly, the relationship between Resistance and the DSP is a unique one. No other tendency in this country has got the youth question as clear as we have. But then it's also very hard to codify all aspects of the relationship.

The most important point to make is that Resistance has organisational independence from the party but not political independence, i.e., it does not have a separate program from the party's. Resistance recognises that a mass revolutionary party is needed to provide political leadership to the working class in its struggle for power and it regards the DSP as the nucleus of that party. Resistance does not seek to develop its own program for the working class struggle for socialism. It accepts the party's program and specific programmatic resolutions as the general political framework for deciding its own policies and activity.

The DSP is committed to building an independent revolutionary youth organisation as the best way to attract young people to the socialist movement in general and the revolutionary party in particular.

Participation in the independent revolutionary youth organisation helps develop youth as revolutionary cadre by having to take on leadership responsibilities within an organisation that is committed to revolutionary politics and which functions according to democratic centralist principles, but which does not carry the levels of responsibilities in terms of commitment, programmatic understanding, or policy decisions that a revolutionary party does. But Resistance's organisational independence from the party facilitates this development of young socialists into revolutionary cadre only because it is combined with Resistance's political solidarity and close collaboration with the party.

We often use the formulation that Resistance's organisational independence from the party — the fact that it has its own independent structure, its own conferences, branches and elects its own leadership bodies — allows young revolutionaries to “make their own mistakes”. But this does not mean we think every generation of young revolutionaries has to repeat the mistakes of the previous generation of revolutionaries in order to develop into revolutionary cadre. We have a party — a multi-generational revolutionary organisation with a definite program that sums the lessons of past revolutionary struggles — precisely in order to avoid, or at least, minimise the repetition of past mistakes. Through collaboration with the party, each new generation of young

revolutionaries that passes through Resistance can train themselves to become revolutionary cadre without having to repeat the mistakes of their predecessors.

The relationship between the DSP and Resistance, just like the relationship between members of the party, is built upon comradely cooperation to achieve a common goal — building a revolutionary cadre party with mass influence in the working class, a party capable of leading the working class to victory in the struggle for socialism. ■

*Resistance books*