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PRINCIPLE OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN RUMANIA

[Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources.]

The Rumanian Workers' Party is the force which guides and leads the people on the road to socialism. It performs this task successfully because it acts as a united collective, welded by unity of will and action and by the unity of discipline, and because it unyieldingly represses any deviation from the party line or any lack of discipline or organization.

The party, true to Marxist-Leninist principles, sees to it that the principle of collective work, the highest principle of party leadership, is strictly enforced by all its branches. Strict respect for this principle enables the party to adopt the right policy and to mobilize party organizations, and through them mobilize the masses of working people, to apply this policy. Correct decisions, the timely correction of errors in work, correction of deviations from party policy, and the prompt unmasking of enemy tools can only be ensured when problems are discussed collectively on the basis of criticism and self-criticism.

Collective leadership is very important for the education of the cadre, for it enables new and young forces devoted to socialism and full of creative spirit to rise to positions of leadership. Collective leadership also ensures systematic and rigorous control over every party and government activist.

The party is a freely accepted fighting association of communists, who share the same ideas and have united to make a reality of their grandiose aim of building Communism. That is why, in the party, the right of decision belongs to the mass of party members and party leadership is collective, not a one-man job.

Collective leadership flows logically from the principle of democratic centralism which produces the correct blend of centralism and iron discipline, with great latitude for initiative and activity on the part of Communists.

The decision of the plenum of the Central Committee concerning the improvement of party work and the strengthening of the party's ties with the masses is of great importance in this connection. It has laid great stress on the need to improve collective leadership and has brought to light serious deficiencies that still persist in that field. The Central Committee has also taken a series of practical steps to broaden internal party democracy and to activate party members. It has directed all organizations to apply the principle of collective leadership on an ever-increasing scale.

Collective leadership is mainly achieved by collective formulation of decisions. The party statutes provide that organizations and organs shall make decisions only after detailed discussion at meetings of rayon, city, and regiune party bureaus and committees, or at meetings of primary organizations. Some party organs have already begun to improve collective leadership. The bureau of the Bais Mare Regiune Committee, for instance, prepares its meetings well ahead of time, draws up and circulates the agenda among members, and helps speakers to prepare themselves thoroughly. The members are therefore in a position to discuss problems intelligently and to make valuable suggestions. The debates are therefore critical and fruitful, and the decisions reached are the result of the collective work of all members. On the other hand, the secretaries of the Bucharest, Bacau, and Oradea regiune committees have made decisions single handed without consulting members or paying attention to their suggestions.

STAT

In other party committees, familiarism and purely formal criticism and self-criticism are the rule. The bureau members approve decisions with which they really disagree, just because they do not want to quarrel with the secretary. These are of course not collective decisions, whatever the appearance, but one-man decisions.

The principle of collective leadership further demands that all members contribute actively to the solution of all problems before them and not confine themselves to their specific tasks. The party committees include the best and ablest members working in the most varied fields; if party membership is really collective and each member has his say, the committee can draw on a vast store of experience and knowledge, and can be relied upon to reach the right decisions.

Plenary meetings of party committees held periodically are another concrete manifestation of collective leadership. In their capacity as highest directing organs of party organizations during the intervals between conferences, the plenary party committees have the duty to solve the chief problems that arise. However, in some party organizations the plenary committees are only rarely assembled and when they are, only trifling matters are discussed. The Tudor Vladimirescu Raion Party Committee Bureau in Bucharest can be given as an example. Since June, no meeting of the plenary committee has been held. This is an infraction of the rule of collective leadership and indicates that the bureau is considered superior to the full committee. This is of course completely wrong, for the bureau has only delegated authority and is answerable for exercise of that authority to the committee. Its task is to direct and to supervise the execution of decisions made by the party, the government, and its own committee, to which it must report; it is not to take the place of this committee which is elected by the conference.

The most frequent cases of diminution of the party committee's role and therefore of violation of the collective leadership principle occur where the committee secretary is allowed to give orders to the committee.

An extreme case happened in Lugoj Raion, where the first secretary had reduced the committee to a mere figurehead and even dared threaten activists who criticized anything he did. The committee plenum was finally forced to dismiss him. Other secretaries think they have the right to sum up the debates with no regard for the members' expressed opinions, and do not even submit this summary for the members' approval. This sort of thing is of course intolerable.

The party absolutely condemns organization leaders who disregard the elected party organs and who adopt bureaucratic methods and transform committees from organisms full of initiative and creative energy into administrative institutions. The duty of committee secretaries is to ensure the execution of committee and bureau decisions and the smooth functioning of the party apparatus. But these important duties cannot be fulfilled at the expense of collective leadership exercised by the committees.

The collective leadership principle further demands thorough preparation of all party meetings as already stated. If members are unacquainted with the subjects to be debated, they cannot take effective part in the discussion, and the upshot is that the secretary, being the only one familiar with the subjects, has everything his own way. Similarly, the text of the final decision must be drafted in advance in order to be discussed by the members; if it is drawn up at the end of the meeting, it merely reflects the point of view of the man or men who wrote the text. This was the case at the open meeting of the Bacau Regiune Party Committee, held in June 1953.

STAT

Meetings of the party activists are a valuable means of enlisting the cooperation in party leadership of the best men. The activist is the voice of public opinion in the party organization and can therefore reveal many deficiencies and suggest effective remedies. Party committees must therefore hold frequent meetings of activists, must encourage criticism and self-criticism, and must invite discussion of party and government decisions and of the most important local problems.

The meetings of the activists have of course no power to reach binding decisions, but their conclusions do reflect grass-root opinion and should therefore be seriously weighed and, if possible, translated into fact. Many party committees treat meetings of the activists superficially and are content to let problems be solved by a small group of activists. This is contrary to the decisions of the 19-20 August 1953 Plenary Meeting which prescribed the periodic holding of such meetings. Erroneous procedures are illustrated by the Faget Raion Committee, Timisoara Regiune, which disregarded remarks and suggestions of activists.

The party apparatus plays an important part in the collective work of party organs, provided it is properly led and supervised. Its task is to check on the execution of party and government decisions made by party, state, and economic organs and to select and assign cadres. The Central Committee Plenary Meeting of January 1950 specified precisely the role of the directing organs and the functions of their apparatus. Nevertheless there are cases when sections of regiune and raion committees encroach upon the duties reserved for the elected directing organs. These obstacles to efficient work usually occur when the party committee acts as if it were an administrative agency, failing to direct and to supervise its apparatus, and does not act as an elected body subordinate to the organization; on the other hand, the party committee's work is unsatisfactory when supervision from below is weak.

The party meeting is the organ which directs the basic organization. The members at these meetings discuss and solve all important problems of party life and economic work; they mobilize Communists, and through them, all working people, to carry out party and government directives, in an effort to raise the standards of living and culture. The party meeting is important because every Communist has the chance to give his opinion openly and to contribute to the decisions of the meeting. It also encourages members to participate in directing the organization and develops among them the feeling that they are masters of the party. It also strengthens the spirit of collective work. However, it is only when bureaus call party meetings regularly and prepare them thoroughly that the most important problems are discussed, that the members participate intensely in the life of the organization, that the ties between the bureau and the other members are tightened, that the organization acts as a united fighting collective, and that its activity increases considerably. When the raion committees plan the meetings and the agenda without consulting the members, the primary organization's activities suffer.

Another serious violation of the collective leadership principle is the failure to call general meetings of Communists in those enterprises and institutions that have party committees. Collective leadership can only exist where the critical and self-critical spirit is constantly developed within the collective. It is through criticism that the party organizations supervise each activist, whatever his position. The party plenum of the Central Committee of August 1953 severely criticized those party leaders who feared that their prestige would be stunted by criticism. These people not only failed to create favorable conditions for the development of criticism and self-criticism, but brutally abused criticism from below. This was the case with Alexandru Hera, secretary of the party committee in the Ministry of Light Industry. The repression of criticism on the ground that it destroys the authority of the cadre

STAT

cannot be tolerated. In our party we do not have "superior" members who may criticize others but who are protected against being criticized, or "common" members who are only entitled to self-criticism. A leader must not only teach the masses, he must also learn from them. He must subordinate his will to the will of the collective, for only in this way can real collective leadership be achieved.

Characteristic of the Communist method of collective leadership is the fact that it does not conflict with field work. By close collective analysis of problems and constant collaboration with the masses, the party organs manage to fulfill their tasks correctly and in time, without numerous meetings and endless repetitious discussions.

A danger to be avoided is the calling of meetings at excessively short intervals. This only consumes a great deal of time which could be better employed in field work, and also leads to superficiality, as the meetings are then inadequately prepared. The bureau of the Alud Raion Party Committee, for example, during a 6-month period held 37 special bureau meetings and seven special committee meetings, in addition to regular bureau and committee meetings.

The collective character of leadership finds expression in the collective preparation of decisions, as well as in collective work of organizing the masses for the proper execution of the decisions. This demands continuous checking on the manner in which decisions are carried out, for the wisest and most important decisions are worthless if they are not carried out, or if they are carried out bureaucratically. The result is that more meetings are held to rehash the same old shortcomings, more decisions are made, and more time is wasted in office work instead of being spent in the field.

Another important element of collective leadership is the combined collective formulation of decisions with personal responsibility on the part of every member for the sphere of activity assigned to him. Decisions are collective, but the allotted tasks are individual and clearly defined. Cases such as the following are not permissible: The Grivita Rosie Raion Party Committee failed to call one member elected 2 years ago to any of its meetings. This man did not know if he was still a member of the committee. This is a gross violation of the principle of collective leadership and of the rights of party members.

The correct application of the collective leadership principle further demands strict compliance with the statutory provisions concerning the election of party organs and the submission of reports to the party organizations by the party organs. According to the decision of the 19-20 August 1953 Plenary Meeting, elections must be held annually for leaders of primary party, raion, and city organizations, and every 2 years for regional organizations. The principle of election and periodic accounting, and the regular holding of party meetings and conferences, allows party members to check on the activities of elected organs, to hear their reports, to criticize them and make decisions, and to select the best men for responsible positions. The practice of some organizations in filling vacancies by co-optation instead of election is of course a flagrant violation of the internal democracy principle.

Reports by party organs to their constituents on their activities are equally important and must be submitted regularly, not only on the occasion of the special meetings prescribed for that purpose but also on the occasion of elections.

The preparation of the Rumanian Workers' Party Congress, scheduled for March 1954 by decision of the Central Committee, is important in the development of internal party democracy and collective leadership. The mass of party members through the party's representatives, will be drawn into the debate on the fundamental principles of party policy, and participate directly in the formulation of the party line and tactics.

STAT

Application of the principle of collective leadership in all party organs is one of the most important conditions for the successful accomplishment of the tasks facing the party and the working people on the road to socialism in our country.(1)

The highest leadership principle in the Rumanian Workers' Party is the principle of collective leadership. The cult of personality stands in direct contradiction to this principle, for it reduces the role of the party and its leadership and weakens the creative activity of the party masses. Party organs, in all their activities, must demonstrate to members and nonmembers the great collective strength of the party and the collective wisdom and experience of its leadership in the solution of all problems.

Party meetings are extremely important. The various organization bureaus must get all party members and candidates to take part in the meetings by impressing upon them that participation is a Communist's prime duty. The poor attendance at meetings of Communists belonging to various party organizations may be explained in a number of cases by failure on the part of bureaus to notify the members, in advance, of the place and time of the meeting, and of the topics to be debated; in other cases it may be explained by failure to draw attention to members who regularly fail to attend.(2)

SOURCES

1. Lupta de Clasa, Bucharest, Sep 53
2. Ibid., Oct 53, article signed by V. Sila

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