

# In a Regiment Party Committee: A Discussion on Party Democratic Centralism

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*Democratic centralism is our Party's organizational principle. Correct handling of relations between the individual and the collective in the Party committees at different levels is an important question in carrying out democratic centralism and an important guarantee for maintaining Party collective leadership. The following discussion by a regiment Party committee in the P.L.A. Tsinan Units explains this question theoretically as well as their experience on it. —Ed.*

Not long ago, the standing committee of a regiment Party committee in the P.L.A. Tsinan Units arrived at a decision after collective study and in the light of the ideological level of the regiment's cadres. But when the decision was sent for approval by the secretary who was away at a meeting, it was held up because he did not agree to it. The committee members did not approve, but they thought that they could do nothing but obey because the secretary was the one to make final decision.

Later when the Party committee was studying the question of democratic centralism, somebody brought up the matter and a debate took place. Some comrades said: The secretary was wrong because he should not negate a decision of the collective simply by his individual opinion. Others argued: The secretary's opinion was decisive. Since he did not agree to the decision, there was a reason for his holding it up.

## **How Should the Secretary View His Own Opinion?**

At the beginning, Comrade Li Tseng-hai, the secretary, thought that his opinion was correct because although the content of the decision was all right, it was not the right time. As a Party secretary, he had the responsibility to hold it up.

The secretary had the responsibility, but should he negate a decision by the majority without the Party committee discussing it? After discussion, they agreed: The secretary was the main responsible member in the Party committee. He had to "guard the pass" with Mao Tsetung Thought. But guarding the pass and the practice of democratic centralism should be unified. "The relation between the secretary and the committee members is one in which the minority must obey the majority." The secretary should not, on the pretext that he was responsible for guarding the pass, violate the Party's principle of democratic centralism and negate the decision by the majority. He should carry out democratic centralism, maintain Party collective leadership and rely on "squad members" to guard the pass instead of relying on himself.

Some comrades cited the following incident: At the end of last year, the regiment decided that the first company should try out on manoeuvres. Having been entrusted with the task, the first company made a detailed plan and submitted it to the Party committee for approval. Many members on the standing committee thought it was good and could be put into effect. Comrade Li Tseng-hai, however, felt that the guiding ideology was not so correct for the plan did not pay enough attention to political and ideological education and emphasized too much on technical training. This time he did not simply turn down the opinions of other comrades but submitted the two different views to the standing committee to be studied. After full discussion, they all agreed with Comrade Li Tseng-hai and corrected the training plan. In addition, the Party committee sent a cadre to the company to help in the work. Implementing Chairman Mao's instructions conscientiously, the first company turned the manoeuvres into a vivid political education and successfully fulfilled the training task. All of the committee members thought that the secretary had done very well that time because he used his correct view to overcome the incorrect views of some standing committee members and raised the understanding of the "squad members" on this question. Democratic centralism was practised while the secretary guarded the pass well.

Then somebody said: The aim in practising democratic centralism is to concentrate correct opinions. If the secretary's opinion was correct, could he himself negate the majority's opinions? Careful analysis made them agree that this should not be done. The reason was: First, "the minority must obey the majority" is one of the fundamental principles of democratic centralism. If the opinion of most members was incorrect while the secretary's was correct, he could only make them accept his view by reasoning instead of negating their views simply on his own. Secondly, of course the secretary would think that his own opinion was, correct. But whether it was correct or not depended on the judgment of all the members of the Party committee. Practice showed that the secretary's views, were sometimes incomplete and unsound and even wrong because he did not listen modestly to others' opinions or he was not good at concentrating correct views. If he just simply negated most of the committee members' opinions, there would be the danger of negating correct views by an incorrect one.

### **How Should the Members Treat the Secretary's Opinion?**

As the discussion went deeper, some comrades raised another question: Quite a number felt that it was not so good for the secretary to hold up a decision by the collective. But why had no one raised any objection on time. It was because these comrades thought that the secretary was the one who was mainly responsible for Party committee work, and his views were decisive. It was only natural for him to make the final decision. So, although they held a different view, they did not raise their objection any more, thinking that this was a way of showing respect and support for the secretary.

What was the correct attitude towards the secretary's views? After analysing it, they all agreed that members should respect and support the secretary. Without this, the Party

committee could not be a strong leading nucleus. On the other hand, committee members and the secretary should first of all respect and support the collective leadership of the Party committee. Without this, the collective leadership might become the personal leadership of the secretary. Thus by cutting themselves off from maintaining the principle of collective leadership by the Party committee, there would be no true respect and support for the secretary. The result would be violating Party democratic centralism and weakening the collective leadership of the Party committee. They should respect and support the secretary and at the same time maintain Party collective leadership.

One incident gave the Party committee a lot to think about. The committee decided to have an exercise on attacking by laying an ambush. When the Party committee was working out the plan, most of the comrades based themselves on their experience in night attack by ambush and suggested that the troops should make their ambush near the front. Both Secretary Li Tseng-hai and deputy secretary Feng Teh-yueh felt that the suggestion was good, so they decided that, a plan should be drawn up accordingly.

However, when the plan was nearly completed, one committee member, after careful consideration, raised an objection. He pointed out that The previous manoeuvres had been at night and it was easy to find cover because of poor visibility. But this time the attack was to be made in the day time. Visibility would be good. Thus the troops could not achieve their aim by an ambush. This committee member suggested that the Party committee once again talk over these two different views. Finally all of them agreed that this member's thinking was correct and revised the plan. The manoeuvres were successful. This incident made them understand that the committee member had combined respect and support for the secretary with maintaining Party collective leadership. Departure from this principle would not be a responsible attitude towards the Party's cause and there would be no true, respect and support for the secretary.

### **How Secretary's Opinions Become Opinions of Majority of Committee Members**

Some comrades again asked: The relation between the secretary and the committee members is one in which the minority must obey the majority?

With this specific problem in mind they studied Chairman Mao's teaching: "A secretary or deputy secretary will find it difficult to direct his 'squad' well if he does not take care to do propaganda and organizational work among his own 'squad members', is not good at handling his relations with committee members or does not study how to run meetings successfully." They came to understand that at a Party committee meeting, sometimes the secretary is in the minority at first but later becomes one of the majority after work is done among the committee members. This is absolutely normal and in accord with the principle of democratic centralism. Without doing such work, a unity of understanding within the Party committee will not be attained, the "squad members" will not march in step and democratic centralism will not be established.

The committee members found that the first time, the secretary only wanted others to agree to his opinions, without ideological preparation for listening to others' opinions. As a result, he made a wrong concentration and unity of the opinions. In a disguised form, such a work method is in essence deciding things on one person's say-so. The work method he followed the second time was to "listen to differing opinions carefully and make a serious analysis of the complicated circumstances and differing opinions." In this way, both the "squad members" and himself were educated and he was therefore able to achieve a correct concentration and unity of the opinions.

### **Secretary's Summary**

Finally, the secretary said: Though the present discussion proceeded concrete problems, it was around the central topic - the question of the right relation between the individual and the collective among the committee members. This decides whether democratic centralism can be satisfactorily carried out. The committee members' discussions show that the relation between the secretary and the Party committee should first be put right. Though the secretary holds the position of "squad leader," he should be placed under the collective leadership of the Party committee and must never lord it over the latter. A Party committee is made up of committee members. If a secretary stands high above the committee members, he is in essence placing himself above the Party committee. Ordinary committee members do not handle the day-to-day work of the Party committee, but they should not seclude themselves from the Party committee. Instead, they should place themselves inside it, take an active part in collective leadership and consciously safeguard the Party's democratic centralism.

The "secretary is wise" theory existing among us is opposed to the proletarian Party spirit. When a secretary is affected by this theory, he thinks of himself as having a good command of the whole situation, knowing the superior's instructions earlier than others, understanding more about the conditions prevailing at lower levels and so it seems that he is superior to others in everything. Such a theory is in essence a refurbished version of the theory that "the masses are backward." It is a reflection of the idealist conception of history and a manifestation of the impurity of Party spirit.

Among the "squad members" of the Party committee, there are the "squad leader" and the committee members; some are old, others new. The Party committee should, in accordance with democratic centralism, give full play to the initiative and creativeness of every committee member. It should actively support what conforms to Mao Tsetung Thought and consciously resist what does not. It should not think that the secretary's opinions must be better than those of the committee members and that old committee members' ideas must be better than those of new members. To assert that it is a matter of course for the secretary to guarantee there will not be any mistakes of a political nature and to make decisions is a reflection of such an erroneous conception.

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