
Party Discipline

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The success of any movement depends largely upon the discipline within its ranks. A strictly disciplined membership permits the application of concentrated action, concentrated in time, force, and purpose.

There are two kinds of discipline. There is the enforced discipline of the military machine of the capitalist state. This discipline compels a blind obedience to orders from above. It is not the result of agreement of purpose or action by those who are subject to it. It is enforced by fear of courts martial. It is a discipline imposed by force by the capitalist state upon those who are not of the capitalist class to fight for the preservation of capitalism in any nation.

Then there is a voluntary discipline born out of the true conceptions of the interests of the workers and enforced by them because it serves their purposes. This is revolutionary discipline.

The question of discipline has lately become an issue in the communist movement everywhere and has even led to splits in the communist movement in several countries. A little time may therefore be considered well spent in a discussion of this highly important problem.

Some elements in the communist movement everywhere, eager for power, have interpreted party discipline in a sense that would spell undisputed subordination of the membership to the rule of the executive bodies of the party. Such interpretation, practically applied, would surely mean control by the executive body and thus help to establish a dictatorship, not of, but over, the membership.

Our party, still in the process of formation, has to definitely settle the meaning of the terms <illeg.> our literature, so that the rank and file of the movement may be a unit in understanding them. Party discipline depends upon just that understanding and makes it the foundation of the successful fulfillment of the mission of the communist movement.

Party discipline is indispensable. The movement can not function without it. Discipline must be based upon a common understanding

of principles between the membership and the executive which invoke it. The actions of the communist movement are dictated by the needs of the revolutionary class struggle. these needs dictate precise action. Upon the prompt execution of these dictates rests its success. The executive bodies of the communist movement organize for united action. The action itself is the outgrowth of the true concept of the class struggle by the rank and file of the communist movement. Only insofar as the orders of the executive bodies of the movement satisfy that concept may prompt execution of their orders be expected. If the concepts of those rank and file are contrary to those of the executive bodies then the orders of the latter are no avail. No discipline can be enforced, nay — more than that — no discipline is desirable, in that case. The executive bodies may try by sound reasoning to change the understanding of the rank and file, but they can not make the rank and file execute orders contrary to their concept and understanding.

In other words, communist discipline can not be a forced subjection of the rank and file of the movement to the dictates of leaders, but must be a voluntary obedience to the dictates of communist principles. A leadership that can interpret the needs of the revolutionary class struggle will never find itself out of harmony with the membership, and therefore, will seldom or never have need to command obedience. A leadership, however, misunderstanding and misinterpreting those needs will always find itself out of harmony with the rank and file and will not be able to command obedience to its orders, even not in the name of the sacredness of communist discipline.

Wherever discipline is lacking in the ranks of the communist movement something is lacking either in the understanding of the officials or in the understanding of the rank and file of the movement. In either case an appeal to revolutionary discipline is of no avail; in either case revolutionary discipline is unenforceable.

To sum up: Communist discipline can not be enforced from above. It must be voluntary and enforced by the membership itself. Confidence of the rank and file in the integrity and intelligence of its leadership will create a disciplined united action upon the orders of the executive bodies. Unwillingness of disciplinary subjection of the rank and file to the dictates of the leaders is not caused by an absence of discipline in the ranks, but by an absence of confidence in the leaders. All lamentations against the lack of discipline will not help

until that leadership is replaced by one that has the confidence of the membership.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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