

## **Introduction**

In November 1995, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Britain instructed the incoming Executive Committee to establish a Commission on Inner Party Democracy (IPD). The Commission's main report was amended and adopted at the Party's 44<sup>th</sup> Congress in November 1997. This pamphlet reproduces the text of that report in full.

## Communist Party of Britain: Inner-Party Democracy (1997)

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## Democracy in Policy Formation

The Communist Party's activities and organisation are related to the aims outlined in its programme *The British Road to Socialism*, a central feature of which is the building of a democratic anti-monopoly alliance, led by the working class. This programme is constantly under review. Guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism, the Communist Party has a distinctive contribution to make to the building of the alliance, developing its strength and helping it to gain the consciousness that Britain's problems can be solved only by a strategy for Socialism.

The Communist Party does not seek exclusive leadership. It aims to work in association with the broadest movements and organisations, respecting their independence and democracy, discussing with them common problems, learning from their experiences and responding to new ideas. The Communist Party's contribution towards the hard and complex struggle to build the unity of the democratic forces to take political, economic and social power from the monopoly capitalists calls for high qualities of leadership and initiative by all its organisations and members. This in turn requires a conviction that its aims and policies are correct and have been arrived at by a process of informed discussion. Hence the enrichment of the Party's democratic life through open discussion of problems and accountable leadership is essential for developing its ability at all levels to campaign for its aims.

All experience of this process confirms the crucial need to develop understanding and practice of constructive criticism and self-criticism. The Communist Party is organised on the principle of democratic centralism. *The British Road to Socialism* says it:

is a democratic party, one which draws on the initiative and creativity of its membership in planning and carrying through its activity and policy, and in electing its leadership, answerable to that membership. To this end the Party develops and maintains close relationships within its own ranks, between different sections of workers, between men and women, black and white people, young and old.

The Party is centralised, so that it can intervene in the class struggle as a disciplined and united force, once policy is decided. These points embody the principles of democratic centralism which "combines the democratic participation of the membership in Party life with an elected centralised leadership capable of directing the entire Party." (Aims and Constitution of the Communist Party)

The Party rules define democratic centralism as:

- a) All leading committees shall be elected regularly and shall report regularly to the Party organisations which have elected them.
- b) Elected higher committees shall have the right to take decisions binding on lower committees and organisations, and shall explain these decisions to them. Such decisions shall not be in conflict with decisions of the National Congress or Executive Committee.
- c) Elected higher committees shall encourage lower committees and organisations to express their views on questions of Party policy and on the carrying out of such policy.
- d) Lower committees and organisations shall carry out the decisions of higher elected committees, and shall have the right to express their views, raise problems and make suggestions to these committees.
- e) Decisions shall be made by majority vote, and minorities shall accept the decision of the majority.

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To be meaningful, the right to hold and express differences with Party policy must incorporate the right to win others to support it. Party members have the right and duty to raise questions with their branch, and if they win majority support, send resolutions to one of the higher committees. Members of national and district committees have a similar right.

Members of branch committees have the right to take a difference to a branch meeting. Individual comrades have the right to express a disagreement to any committee of the Party up to and including the Executive Committee, and in the Party press. Committees receiving communications expressing political differences or making complaints must consider them and send a reply to the comrade or organisation concerned. Application and interpretation of these rules is to be made in accordance with the principles elaborated in this IPD report.

### **Party Democracy in the Discussion and Formation of Policy**

To give leadership the Party has to put forward clear Socialist policies - short term and long term. To reach such policies demands creative study and the development of the theory of scientific Socialism together with the application of these Marxist-Leninist principles to the specific problems facing the peoples of Britain and the world.

The objectives of the Party in giving leadership to the mass movements for social progress condition the methods whereby the Party stimulates its policy making processes. Party discussion takes place within the framework of the Marxist-Leninist approach to these objectives. There is full freedom in the discussion to apply and develop Marxism-Leninism to our problems and to dispute on controversial issues as they arise. But there is not, and nor can there be, freedom in the Communist Party to advocate ideas contrary to Marxism-Leninism, ideas hostile to the interests of the working class, ideas hostile to the interests of the future of humanity. To allow this would be to introduce into the Party the very ideas the Party is convened to combat within the working class and progressive movement.

The Party's discussion procedures must be laid down to ensure the democratic rights both of individual members, and of the elected leadership. They are also defined to ensure that the content of the discussion is such as to be relevant to the questions of policy which have to be decided.

Formation of policy is not the responsibility of the leadership alone. It demands the maximum active participation of the whole Party membership. To encourage and empower the membership to be fully involved in the discussion and formation of policy, the Party will ensure that communication skills training and Marxist-Leninist education are conducted at all levels of the Party. Communication skills such as writing skills and public speaking skills would creatively enable comrades to participate in, and contribute to, the democratic process of the Party, as well as make them able to present our message to the members.

The Party must draw on the views and experience of all members of the Party and, indeed, of the whole labour and progressive movement. Past experience has shown marked variation in the application of these principles. Commissions such as this are set up in response to inadequacies in the application of these principles to our problems.

In 1957, following the CPSU 20th Congress and its repercussions in Hungary, the then commission stressed the need for the Party to overcome its excessive reliance upon the centre. It called for new means of promoting discussion within the Party. It laid down how views should

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be disseminated, how editorial responsibility should be exercised and how views submitted to higher Party committees were to receive replies.

It established that at Congresses, debate which had become confined to the Congress Standing Orders [Arrangements] Committee should be taken into full Congress. For policy making between Congresses, wherever possible, the CE should consult with the membership, put forward views for consideration, ask the Party members to express their views through the branches and district committees, and open the Party press to the appropriate discussion.

It also defined other types of discussion, where decisions are not necessary or not possible. For example, problems of an educational nature, problems of theory, problems connected with art and science, in which the exchange of contending views may be continuous. These views were adopted at the 25<sup>th</sup> (Special) Congress of the CPGB in 1957. To this end the Party's journals were steered away from top down explanations of policy, towards a more active stimulation of policy making initiatives.

Existing journals launched discussion topics, and a new theoretical and discussion journal was established. The defining of the need for the majority view to prevail over that of the minority, whilst entirely correct - in that failure to apply such a principle gives a minority a veto – was somewhat of a qualified victory, given the loss to the Party at that time of a third of the membership, the third which constituted the minority. Given also what we now know of the developments within the CPSU and the Socialist camp, it may well be that this period and our approach to minority views should be subject to a review.

At any rate we need to recognise that whilst the existence of significant dissenting voices may indeed threaten the dissolution of the Party, as previously believed, the history of the last four decades also shows that it may point to problems imperfectly resolved.

A self-critical analysis of our handling of these problems tends to show that the problems of majorities and minorities have historically been resolved by the departure of the minority from the ranks of the Party, but without solving the problem. If the problem is not resolved, it reappears in other forms. The key question is the resolving of the policy evaluation, not the subordination of the minority to the majority.

The 1979 report did not significantly amend the 1957 one, but in the light of inadequacies of the Party's ideological work, stressed the role of ideological struggle as an important part of the Party's responsibility, and recognised that it is through the confrontation of differing ideas and opinions that Marxism-Leninism is enriched.

Again, areas where the Party does not lay down a policy were defined, such as more general scientific, artistic and cultural questions. In practice, there was an unbalanced acceptance of these principles. The whole Party was not won to the need to engage the ideological struggle, and the outcome was that those who subsequently abandoned Marxism-Leninism gained the ascendancy. In restoring Marxism-Leninism, and re-establishing the Party in 1988, there has been a tendency to conformism around the classics of Marxism-Leninism, which left us ill-prepared to face the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The necessity of minority views being subordinated to the decisions of the majority was upheld. This was agreed in relation to an examination of the way in which policy should be determined and information should flow to fully inform the policy-making process.

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Central to this was the expressed position that alternatives to existing policies should be considered by the whole Party. This was seen as a vital counter to the development of factionalism, where alternatives are considered only within groups of like-minded comrades. This was to be achieved by the discussion of differences within the Party and in its press.

Today we face similar problems. The *Commission of Enquiry into Alleged Factionalism* (1996) didn't find evidence of factionalism, but did point to a "stagnant level of inner Party discussion", and concluded: "It is clear that an opening up of political debate would be a healthier response than the continuation of the current situation."

How, within the restraints of the resources of the Party, do we draw on the positive conclusions of our predecessors, and develop them to face the new tasks of our generation?

In one sense our task is easier, in that the experiences of the last 10 years have forced us to recognise new realities. In other respects, our tasks are much harder. To the tasks of building a mass movement for Socialism and establishing a new social order, are added the new responsibilities of defining, in new conditions, the characteristics of a Socialism which can win popular appeal and defend itself. We have to do this within a world in which the contradictions not just of capitalism, but of human society in general, are coming up against the limits of what the world can absorb in the way of pollutants, or supply in the way of resources.

Evidence is that the whole Party has not considered the alternatives. Political differences, if discussed at all, have been within the EC or between the EC and individuals, with the rest of the Party unaware of them. The drop in membership has reduced income to the degree that there is no effective discussion journal at all. *Communist Review* has been used to provide deeper analyses of the Party's positions on particular question of policy, and this is a vital need. It doesn't permit much in the way of discussion, particularly if its role is seen too narrowly as being to provide explanation, rather than to seek debate.

Underlying political problems which led to earlier Commissions on Inner Party Democracy remain. Provisions for debate and to stimulate discussion, proposed by our predecessors, whilst more difficult for us to implement, are no less important for us.

Central to this is the need for a journal for discussion. The proliferation of simply produced, inexpensive, broadsheets which most organisations use, provide numerous examples which could be emulated by us. Without such a journal there is no way by which comrades can make their views known to members outside their own branch. This seriously restricts democracy in the Party. The freedom to exchange views throughout the Party can only be meaningful if facilities exist for comrades to exercise this right. A discussion journal is essential for the effective operation of inner-Party democracy.

We note a tendency to keep certain discussions within higher Party committees and to delay taking them into the Party as a whole- on such grounds as the facts aren't clear yet, 'Party unity would be disturbed', etc. Questions which are confined in this way can engender disunity. We come back to the need for the whole Party to know of the discussions being held, if the whole Party is to be drawn into sharing the responsibility for policy making.

Discussions initiated only after leading Party committees have established their positions, make policy making more difficult, because anything at variance with an established position is regarded as an attack on the leadership. The contrary view is that if a firm line from the centre does not inform the debate, then anarchy reigns, all views are accorded equal weight, and it is

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more difficult for the leadership to prevail. It must not only lead on policy formation, but on when, and in what form, it will stimulate the Party into the analyses necessary.

There are questions on which a united response by the Party is an urgent necessity, such as tactical questions on mass actions or of our input into policy determinations within the labour and progressive movement. Historically, these questions burn intensely for a time, but have not threatened basic Party unity.

There are other questions, of a more strategic character, e.g., the Alternative Economic and Political Strategy (AEPS) and the *British Road to Socialism* (BRS), which for all attempts to win unity, leave a small minority unconvinced. In practice the continuing discussion around these issues has not been harmful. It puts a responsibility onto the leadership to maintain a vigorous input to this debate, while acknowledging the real concerns of those who are sceptical of aspects of it.

There are larger issues still, those which study the essential characteristics of the epoch, rather than a particular political stance or campaign within it. Earlier IPD reports included questions of culture, of interpretation of the arts and of developments within scientific knowledge and policy, (in this type of question), around which discussion was expected to be continuous. To these in our era should be added questions such as ecology and the environment, the role and operation of nation states in a world dominated by transnationals, continuing analyses of the relative importance of objective possibilities and subjective causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union, etc.

### **Factions**

The right to express a difference of view and secure support for it, does not give comrades the right to engage in factional activity or work for their view outside or across the structure of the Party.

In 1957, a faction was defined as:

*A grouping of Party members outside the recognised organisations of the Party for the purpose of carrying on inner-Party struggle.*

In 1979, as:

*a group which has drawn up a platform and campaigns for it through meetings, journals, pamphlets, the circulation of documents or other forms of contact outside the normal structure of the Party.*

Factions are self-appointed bodies, answerable only to themselves. A group of individuals with the financial resources to publish a journal, and pay fares for comrades from all parts to attend meetings, would enjoy advantage over others whose views might be of equal or greater relevance to the Party and of interest to its members.

Factions are by their nature undemocratic, and debate and argument between them is neither the most democratic nor most effective way of deciding policy. Open discussion within the Party, in which all try to understand and learn from each other; gives comrades holding minority views the opportunity both to win support and to contribute to the collective thinking of the Party. Alternatives to our existing policies should be considered by the whole Party. All members have the right to hear and to consider them. It is by this clash of ideas that the Party's thinking is enriched and its ideas clarified, not by meetings of 'like-minded' comrades.

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The real danger of factions lies in their divisive character. If they were permitted, comrades' loyalties would be divided between their faction and the Party, there would be a clash between their responsibility to their Party organisations and their faction. Inevitably some comrades would become more concerned with winning support for their view than increasing the Party's influence and building it.

Political differences should be discussed within the Party and its press. The rules and practice of the Party provide for this, both in pre-Congress periods and between Congresses. Inadequate facilities for discussion of differences should be corrected by making greater provision within the structures of the Party. There needs also to be adequate provision for comrades in different Party organisations sharing common problems to meet whenever necessary, with the agreement of the appropriate higher committees, in order to exchange experiences.

The Communist Party, based on Marxism-Leninism, is a revolutionary Party, working to bring people into daily struggle to extend democratic control over their lives and to win fundamental social change. Its members come from different strata and a wide variety of backgrounds. It is, however, essential for the Party to have a structure which overcomes sectional interests and enables it to act as a united force. Factions are incompatible with this.

We should not, however, label as 'factional expressions of similar opinion from comrades in different branches and parts of Britain. Comrades meet at various political events, many organised by the Party, and socially. They naturally discuss politics, including any differences they may have with the Party. This is not always in itself factional, but it is important to ensure that it does not lead to actions which conflict with accepted Party practice. Whilst we welcome the conclusion of the *Commission of Enquiry into Alleged Factionalism* (1996) that the existence of factionalism was not proven, we are alarmed at the polarisation into 'blocs' described in that report.

We conclude our recommendations on the formation of policy:

1. We endorse the work of earlier commissions on the need for all the Party to be involved in policy-making procedures, and for alternatives to adopted policies to be considered by the Party as a whole. We recognise that in the circumstance of our re-establishment, not all these provisions have been maintained. There must be a discussion journal which can restore a mechanism whereby these objectives can be met.
2. We endorse the conclusions of earlier commissions regarding the rights of members with dissenting views, and also of the necessity of the Party speaking with one voice, i.e., that the majority view shall prevail. This precludes those opposed to these views from publicly campaigning against the adopted policies. In the light of recent experiences which exposed some radical flaws in our earlier concepts, and our slowness in responding to them, it may prove that the actual application of these principles has been too mechanical.

We add that questions should be judged as to the nature of the issue being evaluated, and also as to the dangers and consequences of error, that in the light of these judgements, debate should be stimulated or guided accordingly; and that the overriding principle is the need to make the most accurate assessment possible, not just to



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re-affirm existing policies in a misguided pursuit of a unity which, if obtained in that way, would prove illusory.

We also conclude that the question of minorities and majorities cannot be separated from the question of the policies around which such divisions occur. The existence of continuing differences is a problem which the Party should address from the standpoint of policy review, not just from those of Party education and Party discipline. Great responsibility and sensitivity is needed in handling differences within the Party. We recognise that there is no debate without differences, no policy development without debate.

3. We unreservedly oppose factionalism. Recent experience suggests that an over tight concept of the responsibilities of leadership can itself lead to suspicions of factionalism.

4. We agree that there is a tendency for Congresses to lose debate to Congress committees. This tendency must be combated and means found to stimulate real exchanges of views within the full Congress.

## How Leadership Is Exercised

The National Congress, made up of delegates elected directly by the Party members and meeting every two years, is the highest authority in the Party. It decides the programme, policy and rules of the Party and elects an Executive Committee to lead all the work of the Party until the following congress.

District/national congresses are held every two years. They decide policies on specific district/national questions within the framework of the strategy of the Party, and the forms of work most appropriate to the conditions of their district/nation, and elect a district/national committee to lead the work.

The Executive Committee has the duty to give leadership in the application of the Party's strategy, popularising and developing understanding of it, participating in broad struggles and movements and initiating specific Communist campaigns towards influencing politics at a national level. It also decides policy on new matters that have arisen since Congress. On this, as on all of its work, it is accountable to the following Congress.

It has to mobilise the Party organisations and members in support of its decisions. This cannot be done solely by issuing leads or directions. It requires clear and patient explanation at meetings and in our press, giving the reasons for the decisions and the courses of action proposed.

Leadership has to be specific and give clear guidance on the forms of activity required. It must take into account varying circumstances in different districts and nations and among different social strata. Decisions should therefore be framed in a way which enables the committees and branches of the Party to relate them to their own nation, district, workplace, community, industry or profession. When experience in working for our policies demonstrates the need for changes, or a shift of emphasis, to different forms of action, it is important to explain the new factors and other reasons for the change.

If changes are made because previous policies required correction there must be no attempt to gloss over errors. Only by admitting them frankly can the changes be understood and lessons learned. The Executive Committee has a particular responsibility for setting an example in criticism and self-criticism.

### Collective Leadership

The Executive Committee and district/national committees are collective leaderships. Their decisions must be the outcome of the maximum collective work, thinking, experience and discussion on the part of all their members. As part of a collective leadership, all members, including those who may be in a minority, have the responsibility of fighting for majority decisions within the Party, in public work and in the labour and democratic movement.

The Party's emphasis on collective leadership is of paramount importance in the role that the Chairperson and General Secretary play in our Party. They cannot operate effectively without a supportive Executive Committee and Political Committee, committed to carrying out the policies decided at Congress in the light of developing political circumstances. All members have the same and equal rights, without restrictions, to be elected to committees and offices of the Party.

It is important that the above principles and methods of work apply to all levels of the Party, from branch, district and nation to Political Committee and Executive Committee, and not just to the Chairperson and General Secretary. The Party should have a Treasurer working together with a finance team.

Minority points of view, together with the arguments against them, should be made known to Party organisations via EC reports. But members of higher committees holding a minority view do not have the right to take their differences downward to their district, nation or branch.

This would undermine the principle of the minority accepting majority decisions and weaken the ability of the collective concerned to light as a united body for its decisions. Having raised their difference they have the right to have their dissent recorded in the minutes and reported. In pre-Congress discussions they have the same right as all other comrades to express their views.

The Executive Committee or district/national committee might in particular circumstances deem it advisable to allow comrades with differences to express them in the Party press or their organisation. There is no absolute right to this, and the EC or other committee concerned must decide whether exercising such discretion would impair its ability to act as a collective force.

### **The Executive and Political Committees, National/District Committees and secretariats**

The EC does not normally have the authority to co-opt to the EC between Congresses. Congress is the only body in the Party that can determine the composition of the EC. However, the EC can invite comrades with specialist expertise on specific questions under discussion by the EC. They will attend on a consultative basis.

The EC should introduce a method of monitoring its decisions. There seems little point in taking decisions without knowing what happens to them in practice. This should be the task of the Political Committee which meets regularly between executives.

The Executive Committee meets every two months, and district/national committees meet at agreed intervals. The EC elects a Political Committee and district/national committees elect secretariats, which are responsible for acting on their decisions and responding to new developments requiring leadership, decisions and initiatives.

The Political Committee includes some of the national officials of the Party, secretaries of some of the largest districts, and some other leading comrades. As a sub-committee of the EC it undertakes the major political responsibility for acting on EC decisions through the departments at Party centre, the Party organisations and the Party press; giving daily direction to campaigns and producing publicity materials. It is responsible for the preparation of EC meetings, including drafts of reports and proposals. All its activities are subject to the endorsement of the EC, to which it is subordinate and accountable.

Members of the Political Committee have the same right as other EC members to speak and vote as they think fit in the meetings of the EC. The Political Committee should comprise no more than one third of the number of EC members and have a majority of non-full-time comrades. It is fully accountable to the EC which is the sovereign body between Congresses, and all the members of the EC must be involved in the day to day leadership of the Party's work.

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Other measures used to ensure that the sovereignty of the EC remains paramount are:

- The CP to issue minutes to EC members, circulate suggestions for EC agendas and ask EC members for proposals.
- More EC members to be involved in the preparation of reports.
- Reports to focus attention on the main issues and present alternatives.
- EC decisions to be taken in the form of written resolutions coming from individual members of the EC as well as from the PC.

Similar principles should guide the relationships between district/national committees and secretariats, taking into account the differences in the size of districts/nations and other circumstances. Secretariat members, too, may speak and vote as they think fit in district/national committee meetings.

### **Party Discipline**

The disciplinary powers given to the Party committees and branches in rules should be used only in clearly defined situations, viz in cases of

- Gross misconduct bringing the Party into disrepute.
- Wilful defiance in public, in the press, or the mass movement, of the Party's policy as decided by an elected Party committee or branch.
- Factional activity as defined above.
- Activities aimed at an organisational split in the Party.
- Wilful breach of Party rules.

## **The Structure of the Party**

Our Party works in a developed multinational, multi-racial society with complex problems expressed in manifold ways to people in different areas, strata and occupations. Each organisation of the Party therefore has to find the most effective way of relating the strategy and policies of the Party to the actual conditions and needs of the people it aims

The Party structure must be designed to facilitate taking our policies to the people and organising the struggle in support of them. Hence the need to give priority to assisting the branches to become leading forces in their workplaces, communities and higher education institutions, and for methods which ensure that the higher committees decisions are guided by experience gained in activity and give all our organisations a clear conception of our policy.

### **The Party Branches**

The branches are the point at which members, all of whom should play a part in their work, can contribute to policy formulation and the election of higher committees. Their experiences in public campaigning enable them and the leading committees of the Party to test the correctness of our policy and activities and they provide our members with both political experience and theoretical training. Hence their importance for the functioning of democratic centralism.

The minimum size of a Party branch shall be three members. There should be no maximum size for a branch. However, it is up to the national leadership, nations, districts and branches to ensure that branches within a district/nation are not of such disproportionate size to each other that the Party's democracy is distorted.

Our best branches relate the strategy and policies of the Party to the actual situation in their workplace or community. They work publicly, contest elections and develop close relations with organisations of the labour movement and other forces working for progressive demands, They hold regular meetings, usually open to interested non-Party people, and maintain contact with their members.

Continuous efforts are needed to improve the work of all our branches, developing their ability for taking political initiatives and collective work, overcoming formal methods of work and meetings and making greater use of members' talents and particular interests. It is also important to make arrangements that help comrades with children to overcome constraints against their playing a full part in political life.

All the leading committees of the Party must give constant help to branches' efforts to become self-reliant organisations, able to identify issues, campaign around them and assist their members who are active in other movements and organisations. They must examine the service given to the branches, and the staff, money and time devoted to them. Their members must play a part in branch activities.

The branches raise very large amounts of money to maintain the national and district organisations of the Party, and they must be given practical help to raise, in addition, funds for their own activities. The varied experiences of our branches and the differences in the levels of development require the higher committees to provide means for the cross-fertilisation of ideas

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and experiences, so that they can learn from each other and raise the ability of all to work for our strategy.

District/national schools, discussion conferences, bulletins, the circulation of district/national committee minutes, national and district materials for the guidance of branch officers and the allocation of district/national committee members to report to branches and assist them, are some practical steps which should be taken. All new members should be issued with a copy of the Party's rules (Aims and Constitution of the CPB).

### **The EC and District/National Committees**

One of the important questions in the development of the two-way flow between the Executive Committee and lower Party organisations is the method of reporting the proceedings of the EC. This cannot be approached in any mechanical fashion since branches and district/national committees have to take from these reports what is most appropriate and useful to their work.

This requires:

- Making EC decisions available quickly to our members through our press in a form which provides more of the cut and thrust of the debates at the EC and conveys clearly the arguments in support of them; and circulating EC minutes to district/national committees.
- Reports at district/national committees and other meetings to bring out more adequately estimates of campaigns, with a critical examination of the Party's strengths and weaknesses aimed at helping the lower levels of the Party to make an appraisal of their own work
- Use of aggregate meetings addressed by members of the EC, extended meetings of the EC attended by all district/national secretaries and other comrades with relevant responsibilities and extended district/national committees attended by comrades from appropriate branches.
- The possibility of direct mailings to members, where thought necessary, should be examined. There is a danger that this could affect the democracy of the Party, but there are situations where direct mailing would help the dissemination of information. Whether the Party has the resources for this would have to be examined.

### **Area, City and Borough Committees**

These committees may be set up by district/national committees in consultation with the Executive Committee, with clearly defined functions and rights.

### **District and National Boundaries, and Levels of Leadership**

It is desirable that each district or nation should correspond to a clearly identifiable social, economic or administrative area. The present size of the Party does not make this possible in every case. Some correspond to counties, some to regional planning areas and in the case of Scotland and Wales to countries. Others are made up of a group of adjacent counties or areas. In districts in this latter category, the elaboration of specific policies is more difficult. Further discussion is needed on the role of district and national committees, and how they work in the present structure of the Party.

### **CE Sub-Committees and Specialist Groups**

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The CE appoints comrades from its membership to the sub-committees and endorses the names of other suitable comrades after consultation with the district/nation concerned.

There are also specialist groups working under the direction of EC sub-committees. These are open to comrades involved or interested in their work and should have a democratic structure.

### **Advisory Committees**

Where members are engaged in the same sphere of activity, the Executive Committee may arrange to set up an advisory committee in which those members can discuss how best to promote the policy of the Party in that sphere and develop our relations with the broad left. In the above context there is a need to distinguish between specialist and industrial advisories. Where specialist advisories arrive at a definitive position it may be necessary to refer it to the appropriate industrial advisory, via the Executive Committee, to determine a collective response. Advisory committees are not policy-making bodies, they must operate Party policy as decided by Congress and the EC, and they are accountable to committees elected by national and district Congresses and through them to the congresses. because of their role in the application of Party policy, the committees to which they are responsible should define their powers and review their activity, taking reports of their work, and wherever possible involve their members in their deliberations. This is necessary to help overcome tendencies to conduct work away from the district and branch structure of the Party.

Communist Party members belong to, and are active in, a wide variety of organisations. They meet from time to time to discuss how to win support for our policies, develop the maximum unity with other left forces and assist their organisations to achieve their aims and advance their members' interests. All Communists have a duty to work for policies decided by congresses and the committees democratically elected by them. On other questions, comrades have the right to act as they think fit and, while meetings of the type referred to here cannot under Party rules take binding decisions, the comrades attending them have the right to expect that majority views will be respected by all concerned.

Participation in the work of advisory committees, EC sub-committees and specialist groups is not an alternative to working in the basic units of the Party, its branches, which have the main responsibility for our public campaigning and are the place where all members are able to exercise their democratic rights. This will contribute towards overcoming tendencies to sectionalism within the Party and ensure that the results of the advisory committees' work are fully integrated with the whole organisation and life of the Party.

Advisory committees are a valuable resource of the Party and provide information that would otherwise be unavailable to the Party leadership as a whole. It is important that reports of advisory committees are sent to the C so that they can, after discussion, activate any recommendations.

### **Full-time Party Workers**

Whilst at the moment we have only one full-time paid worker, this will change with the growth of the Party and more resources become available.

## Congresses

The National Congress is the highest authority in the Party. It decides strategy, policy and rules and elects the leadership. Resolutions to Congress can also propose amendments to *The British Road to Socialism*, and the BRS should be considered to be constantly under review. The conduct of Congress and the discussion preceding it are, therefore, of paramount importance for the democracy of the Party.

In recent years, efforts have been made to stimulate a higher level and greater amount of pre-Congress discussion in our press and organisations, as well as improving the quality of discussion at the Congress. These have led to some improvement but more needs to be done to ensure that delegates come to Congress equipped to carry out their responsibilities and that Congresses are structured in a way which facilitates lively discussion and clear-cut decisions.

At present, Congresses are held in mid-November. In the preceding May the EC publishes the Congress agenda and in July it drafts for immediate publication the resolutions it is placing on the Congress agenda.

Discussion then takes place in the Party press and organisations; districts, nations and branches draft amendments to the EC resolutions, place their own resolutions on the agenda, make nominations for the EC, Appeals Committee and Auditors and elect their delegates.

Nearer the date of Congress, usually in October, the district/national committees appoint their representatives to the Congress Committees from among the full delegates elected by themselves and their branches.

Branch resolutions and the amendments to EC resolutions are dispatched to the delegates immediately they are printed, and the EC discusses them at a meeting two weeks before the date of congress in order to convey its views to the relevant Congress Committees.

Although in recent years, the EC has moved away from omnibus resolutions towards more specific resolutions on issues it regards as of key importance, the length of its resolutions frequently leads to branch discussions centring around marginal questions which individual comrades wish to amend, and the volume of amendments, of which only a small minority are of substance, is so great that delegates have difficulty in finding time to assimilate them.

At present, and for the foreseeable future, our limited resources impose restraint upon the length of Congress. The agenda has to be arranged so that delegates have adequate time to debate and decide the principal matters before the Party. Also, time should be made available for more informal discussion, for example with comrades involved in the same struggles, but this should not be to the detriment of formal business. This places a limit on the number of delegates from fraternal Parties who can participate, and we have therefore adopted the practice of inviting only those fraternal Parties and movements with whom at that particular time we have a special responsibility for solidarity campaigns to be represented and address the Congress.

In future, the Congress shall be over three days over a Bank Holiday weekend. The location of Congress shall be set by the Executive Committee.\*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> \* The 44<sup>th</sup> Congress passed an enabling motion to allow the incoming EC's life to be extended from November 1997 to most appropriate Bank Holiday in the year 2000.



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Congress Standing Orders empower the EC to decide the number of committees required for Congress. An Election Preparations Committee, Arrangements Committee and Credentials Committee must be set up and usually there is also a Resolutions Committee. The function of these committees is to assist the work of Congress enabling it to deal with the very large volume of business placed on the agenda by the Party organisations.

The EC-nominated members of the committees have taken part in a collective discussion in which the EC has arrived at a view on the matters coming before Congress. They may maintain that position in the Congress committees, although they are not bound to do so.

The retiring EC plays an important part in identifying the issues which will figure largely in the pre-Congress discussion and at the Congress. While the Function of leadership is necessary there is a need to provide greater scope for branches and districts to take initiatives in congress preparations both on policy issues, and in the election of the EC.

What is needed is a system of early consultation with the branches so that the EC can ascertain their opinions on the issues needing debate and decision before putting forward for consideration and amendment its own resolutions. This, with a limit to the number of amendments, would help focus attention on questions of genuine and significant controversy and new areas of policy. Therefore, eight months before the date of Congress, the EC should issue to the Party a short statement setting out its first views on the main questions which should be the centre of debate at Congress. Districts, nations and branches should then inform the EC of their opinions, make alternative proposals and indicate the priority to be given to the various issues.

In the light of the response, the EC at its meeting six months before Congress should then decide the major items for the Congress agenda, proceed to draft its resolutions for adoption at its following meeting and circulate them to the branches and districts for discussion and amendment.

The aim should be to have only two or three EC resolutions, and for them to be as brief and cogent as will express the EC's summarised analysis of the topic selected, the essential political argument, and the conclusions and proposals. Branches and district/national committees should be allowed to submit up to three amendments to each EC resolution in addition to two separate resolutions on topics not covered by the CE resolutions or to amend the BRS. The closing date for these would be six weeks before the date of Congress. However, the EC should discuss the number of resolutions and amendments as part of an examination of Congress.

The report of work of the retiring EC should be made widely available. While it is mainly a factual account of its own work, its sub-committees and the departments at Party Centre, it should include brief estimates of the most important policies and campaigns initiated by the EC and the main activities of its sub-committees.

The collective position of the EC is placed before Congress in the various ways outlined here. In the congress, EC members have the right to speak and are not bound by the collective position of the EC. They do not have the right to vote unless they are full delegates.

### **Congress Committees**

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The role of both the arrangements committee and the resolutions committee is to facilitate the work of Congress. They should not be arenas for political debate, which should take place within the Congress. They decide which areas of policy to recommend to Congress for debate, and select the amendments and resolutions providing the best formulations for debating these issues. In addition they facilitate the compositing of amendments or resolutions which will help Congress to focus on the issues, and recommend how Congress should deal with those it has not the time to debate.

In the process of formulating these recommendations there is a tendency, particularly for the Resolutions Committee, to become a forum of political debate and effectively a substitute Congress. To ensure that the maximum number of delegates are aware of its deliberations, its first report to Congress should include brief written reasons for each of its recommendations.

The Resolutions Committee, which meets one week prior to Congress, may decide it is necessary to bring together, on the eve of Congress, delegates from particular branches to begin compositing resolutions. Members of the committee may or may not be present during these deliberations, but the committee has a duty to Congress to ensure that no new material is introduced into any composite. The committee would need to make clear that failure to take part in the compositing process might well mean that the resolution concerned would not get to the floor of Congress. Only delegates representing the organisations placing resolutions on Congress agenda may attend or take part in compositing.

The Congress Arrangements Committee should receive prior to Congress the views of Party organisations, including the EC, on the priorities for debate. The Resolutions Committee should inform it of its proposals for compositing. Armed with this knowledge, the Arrangements Committee should draw up a timetable to recommend to Congress.

In the key areas of controversy many delegates will wish to speak, and among them will be members of the retiring EC. For each debate the Arrangements Committee will have to decide the number of speakers, and ensure that all sides of opinion are expressed.

Delegates representing branches not submitting resolutions on the issue should also be given the opportunity of speaking in the debate.

The movers and seconders should be decided by the delegates party to the composited resolution. Either the mover or another comrade decided by the delegates involved should reply. The Arrangements Committee should indicate to those delegates the total time allocated for the debate and ensure, in co-operation with the Congress chairperson, a proper balance of speakers for and against the motion. No absolute guarantee could be given that all the delegates party to a composite could speak to it.

Voting on the issues debated in each session presently takes place at the end of the session, i.e., before lunch or the close of each day's business, and the timetable is arranged so that key debates conclude immediately before the end of sessions. The EC should examine whether voting should take place this way or after each debate.

Fuller debates are necessary within the EC on:

- Facilitating compositing before Congress
- Keeping debate on the floor of Congress
- Avoiding too much time being spent in committees
- Ensuring open debate

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- How to make more time available during Congress
- Deciding on how speakers are selected
- Making delegates aware of the outgoing ECs views where necessary
- Examining the role of the EC and PC during Congress
- Including the roles and responsibilities of committees in the Rules or Standing Orders
- Voting after debates rather than at the end of sessions
- Numbers of motions and amendments allowed from each branch, district or nation.

### **Membership of Congress Committees**

The experience of these procedures may make it possible to reduce the size of the Resolutions and Arrangements Committees, which the EC is empowered to do under existing standing Orders.

### **Election of Delegates**

The EC determines the basis of representation and delegates are elected by members at branch meetings or meetings of the members in a group of branches and by district committees.

Meetings of branches grouped to elect a delegate cannot adopt resolutions, amend EC resolutions or nominate for the EC, but the meetings do have the right to discuss the Congress issues. The delegate elected can then be made aware of the views of the branches he/she represents but is not, of course, bound by them.

### **Our Press and Pre-Congress Discussion**

All members shall be encouraged to make written contributions to pre-Congress discussion which shall be published throughout the Party in *Communist News*.

The editorial board shall have the right to impose a limit to the length of contributions in the light of practicalities.

### **Scottish, Welsh and District Congresses**

The Scottish and Welsh and District Congresses have to develop policies for their countries/districts within the framework of our strategy as established in *The British Road to Socialism* and British Congress decisions. The function of District/National Congresses varies in accordance with the area/country covered, the nature of its problems and the size and resources of the Party. While maintaining their power to decide policy on matters of concern to the district and to elect the district/national leadership, these Congresses and their preparations should be no more elaborate or lengthy than is necessary to enable them to perform their particular function.

## **Election of the Executive Committee and District and National Committees**

*The British Road to Socialism* outlines the role and character of the Party in giving the leadership needed to transform the labour movement, strengthen working class unity and build alliances with other democratic movements in order to achieve socialism.

Such a Party needs a leading committee which is a united and disciplined collective. It needs to have an understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory and capacity to utilise it for political analysis and to provide creative leadership, as well as experience of political and industrial struggles, contacts with the labour movement and other main forces of the democratic anti-monopoly alliance, contact with Party organisations in the separate countries and main regions, the freshness of new ideas and young people.

No one member of the collective can have all these qualities; it is the combination of the different qualities brought into the committee by the individual members that makes an effective collective leadership.

Leading committees include comrades with varied experience and views on the best course for the Party to take in a given situation. There are therefore bound to be differences within them, as there are within the Party. A comrade's differences, however, are not themselves a qualification for election to the EC, and there is no case for having an 'opposition' on leading committees. A divided leadership is not in the best position to win conviction and unity around policies decided by Congress. The concept itself places a premium on disagreement with the Party's policy, and merit and the ability to contribute towards the fight for the Party's policy would be replaced as a qualification by political opposition.

This does not, however, disqualify from membership of leading committees comrades who, while having serious differences with our policy, are able to make a valuable contribution to the work of the committee and accept the discipline essential to membership of it. The guarantee that leading committees will operate in accord with the Party's political position lies in a vigorous democratic life within the Party. It is normal, indeed essential, that the political position of candidates for election should be taken into account by delegates, and openly discussed throughout the election process, just as their Party record is taken into account.

Throughout our Party's history, several different methods of electing leading committees have been adopted, including the system under which delegates receive a list of all who have accepted nomination and vote without any advice or recommendations from a Congress Committee. Experience has demonstrated that the recommended list is the only way in practice to obtain leading committees which combine all, or as many as possible, of the qualities listed above.

The best way of ensuring that all delegates have the opportunity of being acquainted with the work, record and qualifications of all the nominations is the election of a committee which meets prior to and during the Congress, carefully sifting through available information and discussing the nominees with individual and groups of delegates. The assessment of the committee may not always be correct, but it is certain to be more nearly correct than judgements made by comrades who either know nothing of the work of particular nominees, or have received one-sided reports about them.

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Hitherto the procedure has been that an Election Preparations Committee (EPC) is elected, comprising two members of the retiring EC and one member from each district/nation appointed by the district/national committee from among its full delegates. EC members, even when full delegates, cannot be elected as district/nation representatives.

The Committee is subject to endorsement by the Congress but in order to be able to present its first report early in Congress proceedings, it holds its first meeting prior to Congress opening.

Nominations for the EC come from branches and district/national committees and must receive the support of a majority of those attending the meeting and eligible to vote. The 1974 IPD Report stated that prior to the Congress, the EC examines the list of nominations and draws up a list of comrades whom it suggests to the EPC would constitute the best list it could recommend to Congress. This list is in no way binding, it is on more than the views of the outgoing EC on the work of its members and other candidates nominated.

The EC representatives on the EPC are expected to explain the EC's reasons for its suggestions, but are not bound to support them. Indeed, in the course of the EPC's work, it often receives fresh information which might have influenced the views of the EC had it been in possession of it. This method of working should continue for future Congresses.

The EPC, with the list and biographical details of all nominations, draws up its first list of recommendations to present to Congress, usually in the first session. It explains its procedure for work and invites delegates who wish to press the claims of comrades not included in their first list, or others who are opposed to some who are included, to come to the Committee to discuss the matter.

The recommendations from the Election Preparation Committee should be guided by the need for an Executive Committee which can lead the work of Communists in the broad labour and progressive movements, and in campaigns directed at the wider sections of the population including women, youth and ethnic minorities. It should take account of the need for a stable and experienced leadership as well as the election of new members.

As these discussions are perhaps the most important part of the work of the EPC, it is important that they be conducted in a democratic manner. Delegates should be given time and opportunity to put their case and reply to questions about the persons they have come to discuss with the committee. If they are advancing the claims of a comrade not on the first list they should not be asked "Who would you take off in order to maintain the required balance?" Delegates making points against any comrade on the current recommended list should not be asked "Who would you put on to maintain the required balance. If a new name is included the EPC is responsible for deciding whom to omit. Those being criticised at the EPC have the right to be informed of the criticisms and to be allowed to respond to them.

After its deliberations, always very lengthy, the EPC presents to a closed session of Congress its final recommended list. Delegates who have been to the Committee and have failed to secure its support for their views then have the right to address the full Congress arguing the case for or against the particular nominees they have discussed with the Committee. Adequate time will be made available for the closed session final discussion on suitability of candidates. At the conclusion of the discussion, the delegates cast their votes on a ballot paper including the names of all nominees, being fully assured that the names recommended to them by the EPC are advice only, and it is their right and duty to vote for the nominees of their choice irrespective of those whose names have been recommended to them.

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There is no perfect system for the election of leading committees particularly the kind of committees needed to lead the work of the Communist Party. Our present method has however proved in practice to be superior to others tried. It has enabled our Party to constantly renew its leadership and in the process exercise positive discrimination in favour of industrial workers, women, black comrades and youth.

The method of operating it can be improved and the following system is recommended:

1. At least three weeks before Congress, a list of all accepting nomination, as far as known at that time, should be published in the Party press.
2. Each District/National delegation shall receive copies of the biographical details of candidates which shall be made available at the beginning of Congress. The biographical details shall be signed for by each District/National secretary at the beginning of Congress and be returned at the end of each day.
3. The outgoing EC should continue the present practice of drawing up an initial recommended list for the EPC.
4. There should be no restriction on period of service on the EC.
5. There should be two members of the retiring EC on the EPC, who are not bound by the EC's views, but have the duty to explain them. Each district/nation should have one representative on the Committee. The Chairperson need not be one of the retiring EC representatives.
6. The EPC should, in its first list, recommend to Congress a proposal for the size of the EC.
7. The list should have a minimum of women in proportion to the number of women in the Party.
8. There should not be any reserved federal positions.
9. The EPC's first list should be given to the Congress delegates in writing with their other materials. The first verbal report can then concentrate on the balance of the recommended list. The report should be an information report, and its acceptance would bind Congress only to agreement on the recommended size of the new EC.
10. Delegates should then be able to present their views to the EPC.
11. The EPC should present interim reports to the Congress, indicating names being deleted or names added to its first list.
12. The final report of the EPC should then be given to the Congress in closed session. It should include a summary of the most important questions raised with the committee and an explanation for the committee's decision. Delegates who have raised matters with the committee, but still disagree with its recommendations, should have the right to speak in discussion. Adequate time should be made available for this discussion. The reporter for the committee should have the right to reply briefly to points raised in discussion. Both the report and reply must clearly establish that the report is put forward for advice only and is not subject to endorsement or amendment.
13. Congress should then vote in secret ballot. All names should appear on the ballot paper in alphabetical order. The tellers elected by Congress should be responsible for the count. The votes of all candidates should be given at or after Congress.

The final recommended list should be equal in size to the agreed size of the incoming EC.

### **District and National committees**

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Where possible these should be elected in a similar way to the EC, but the detailed procedure would need to be adapted to the time available, the size of the district/nation and other circumstances.

### **Branch Committees**

These should be elected by secret ballot or show of hands.

## The Press

### The Morning Star

The paper is owned by the People's Press Printing Society through its shareholders. At its annual meetings the shareholders elect a management committee which is responsible for the control of the paper and appoints the Editor, Assistant Editor and the Society's officers.

The special relationship between the Party and the Morning Star depends on our being able to work closely together. Within this relationship the Party does not seek exclusive leadership. As a Party we work to build a broad-based management committee that will have non-communists and communists.

The editorial policy is decided at annual shareholders meetings, and is that of our Party's *British Road To Socialism*, the central feature of which is building a democratic anti-monopoly alliance, led by the working class. Our Party has a responsibility to ensure that this policy is maintained.

Party members work in association with other supporters of the paper, respecting their independence and democracy, discussing with them common problems, learning from their experiences and responding to new ideas aimed at strengthening the paper's role as a platform for the left and other democratic forces, and as a forum for all views facing the movement. While defending continued commitment to the present editorial policy, we recognise that respect for these other forces implies the publication of contributions critical of it.

The Communist Party, in common with other organisations, groups and individuals who have commitment to the Morning Star, will have a view on those problems, and will seek to win support for those views in the forums within the Morning Star, all the time recognising the special political relationship based on mutuality, no respect for the integrity and autonomy of separate and linking organisations. In doing so the principles and practice of the Party's democracy should be exercised.

This clarifies the right of the Communist Party to have its own views on the development of the paper, to seek to win support for these views and to expect Party members to respect the principles of Party democracy in the context of understanding that the Morning Star is a paper owned and controlled by its readers and not the Communist Party of Britain. CPB members must seek to ensure that the broad base of the paper is maintained.

We resolve to continue the established practice at all levels throughout the Party of including the promotion and strengthening of the Morning Star as a principal item on the agenda of all meetings.

### Communist Party journals

*Communist News* and *Communist Review* are controlled and financed by the EC and directly accountable to it. The EC appoints the editors and editorial boards, to whom it allows ample scope in deciding which articles to publish and issues around which to encourage real debate. The writer of an unpublished article may appeal to the EC, who, after investigation may require publication in its original or an edited form.



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In view of their vital importance in debate, every effort must be made with the utmost urgency to ensure regular and frequent publication and speedy distribution, and to encourage members to write for them.

The EC may authorise the publication of other Party journals, including those by specialist groups within the Party. Policy conveyed in them must correspond to the policy of the Party as decided by National Congress and the EC.

### **The Appeals Committee**

This Committee considers appeals by Party members against disciplinary actions taken against them by district/national committees.

The Appeals Committee is the final authority, reporting its decisions to the EC. The member would retain the right of appeal to the next National Congress. In cases where the EC has relevant information it should make it available to the Appeals Committee. The power of the EC to take disciplinary action is unchanged and the members' rights of appeal would be limited to the next National Congress.

### **Finance**

For a Party of our size we raise a very large amount of money, thanks to the tremendous efforts and sacrifices of our members and supporters. There must be full accountability of income and expenditure by all Party organisations. At present accounts, approved by elected auditors, are presented for endorsement to national and district Congresses. This practice should be adopted by Party branches where possible. The fullest information on expenditure should be made available to the Party in order that members can judge whether the moneys raised by them have been put to the best possible use.

Districts and nations should discuss quotas with branches and ensure that branches aim at an income substantially higher than their quota in order that they can finance their own public activities and build up a fund for election campaigns.

## Conclusion

Building a revolutionary political Party is never an easy task. This is specially so in a country like Britain whose ruling class, ruthless in defence of its power and profits, is skilled in the art of dividing its enemies.

Our Party has since its foundation been a Party of struggle. It has won the respect of large sections of the labour and progressive movement by its ability to advance correct policies, give leadership in the struggle for them and provide in its programme the *British Road to Socialism* a clear perspective for fundamental social change. Whatever its weaknesses it is the most significant nationally organised political force in Britain working for socialist change.

It has been able to withstand the fiercest enemy attacks, and at times victimisation and repression, because of its adherence to the principles of Marxism-Leninism and an organisation based upon democratic centralism. These have also enabled its members to participate in the democratic formation of our programme and policy, and election of leaderships, to a greater extent than is enjoyed by members of any other Party in Britain.

The democracy of the Party is not static. Its forms must be related to the conditions in which we struggle and to our aims. Its purpose must be to strengthen the ability of the Party to win support and mobilise the struggle for its objectives. Many of the provisions of the 1979 ID report are still very relevant, and if any general problem has been found in studying that report, it is that it has not been adequately applied.

It is crucial that this failure in the democratic process is not continued, and this should be addressed in two particular ways. This report should be made widely available and the practice of monitoring the application of IPD 1997 should become routine. Real inner Party democracy should become part of our communist culture. The EC and other committees and branches should regularly review the application of ID. Through such living democratic practice our Party's growth will be made much more likely.