

**Excerpt from Paul LeBlanc Lenin and the Revolutionary Party  
From Ch. 7 “The Meaning of Democratic Centralism**

At this point we can fruitfully summarize Lenin’s organizational perspective:

1. The workers’ party must, first of all, be based on a revolutionary Marxist program and must exist to apply that program to reality in a way that will advance the struggle for socialism.
2. The members of that party must be activists who agree with the basic program, who are committed to collectively developing and implementing the program, and who collectively control the organization as a whole.
3. To the extent that it is possible (given tsarist repression), the party should function openly and democratically, with the elective principle operating from top to bottom.
4. The highest decision-making body of the party is the party congress, made up of delegates democratically elected by each party unit. The congress should meet at least every two years and should be preceded by a full discussion throughout the party of all questions that party members deem important.
5. Between congresses, a central committee (elected by and answerable to the congress) should ensure the cohesion and coordinate the work of the party on the basis of the party program and the decisions of the congress. In addition, the central committee has a responsibility to keep all local units of the party informed of all party experiences and activities, while the local committees have a responsibility to keep the central committee informed of their individual experiences and activities. Under conditions of severe political repression and in the midst of major struggles, the authority of the central party leadership may assume much greater weight than at other times; yet that leadership is always bound by the revolutionary Marxist program of the party, by the decisions of the party congress, and by a responsibility (and accountability) to the membership as a whole.
6. It is assumed that within the general framework of the revolutionary program there will be shades of difference on various programmatic, tactical, and practical questions. These should be openly discussed and debated, particularly (but not necessarily exclusively) before party congresses. Within limits—which vary depending on time, place, and circumstance—such differences can be aired publicly. All members should be encouraged to participate in this discussion process and should have an opportunity to make their views known to the party as a whole. It is assumed that at times, groupings will form around one or another viewpoint or even around a full-fledged platform that certain members believe the party should adopt. This—as opposed to groupings based on personal likes and dislikes, and ill-defined moods and biases—provides a basis for ongoing political clarity and programmatic development, which are essential to the health and growth of the party.
7. All questions should be decided on the basis of democratic vote (majority rule), after which the minority is expected to function loyally in the party, and particularly, to in no way undermine the specific actions decided on.

8. Local units of the party must operate within the framework of the party program and of the decisions of the party as a whole, but within that framework they must operate under the autonomous and democratic control of the local membership.

This list describes an organization functioning according to the principle of democratic centralism. It also describes the way in which Lenin thought an organization should function—in 1900, in 1906, as well as in 1914 and afterward. The manner in which democratic centralism could or should be applied would vary depending on the specific circumstances. But the Bolshevik party functioned according to the democratic centralist principle from 1912 until well after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.