

Document Type Directive

Topic On Involvement and Roles in the Organisation (Draft 8)

Date March 11, 2021

First Draft September 21, 2018

Author(s) Christophe Simpson

Editor(s) N/A



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| Background..... | 5 |
| What is LANDS?..... | 5 |
| How Does LANDS Function? | 6 |
| History | 7 |
| Suggestion to Join the PNP | 7 |
| Working with the PNP | 8 |
| Engagement of the State..... | 8 |
| Going Forward | 9 |
| How to Become Involved | 10 |
| Registration – Becoming an Observer | 10 |
| Membership | 11 |
| Requirements..... | 11 |
| Responsibilities..... | 11 |
| Tiers of Membership..... | 12 |
| Starting a Unit..... | 13 |
| Organisational Structure | 14 |
| Units | 14 |
| Blocs..... | 15 |
| Party Congress | 15 |
| Central Committee..... | 16 |
| Politburo | 16 |
| Policy Committees | 17 |
| The Secretariat | 17 |
| Executive Committees | 18 |
| Principles..... | 19 |

First Point of Contact..... 19

 Asking Questions..... 19

 Making Suggestions 20

 Meeting Attendance 20

Taking Positions 21

 Expressing Views Publicly..... 21

 Proper Investigation..... 22

 The Mass Line..... 23

 Democratic Centralism..... 23

 Connecting Theory and Praxis 24

 Ideological Struggle 24

Respect..... 26

 Openness and Honesty..... 26

 Styles of Reference 26

 Obligation and Expectations 27

 Non-Discrimination 27

Readings 28

References..... 29

Introduction

LANDS has come a far way in organising itself over the past 4 years. A series of meetings among 5 individuals had resulted in a decision to form an organisation which has now grown to involve dozens of persons. Rather than a random surge in interest that could easily die out, our progress has been a steady growth that we are confident in our ability to maintain.

We have become more organised over time. From the earliest meetings, it was decided that the organisation would consist of multiple units, and this was eventually done. At first, it was a very loose system that took a lot of effort to manage, but we have designed internal mechanisms to keep everything together and to ensure that we can know the level of engagement that persons in the organisation and the wider movement have.

Things aren't perfect, but noticeable progress has been made. We have multiple active units, which function without constant direct intervention from the party leadership or organisation's executive body. Information flows horizontally within the organisation, without a need for any one individual to be the bridge connecting everyone; cohesion will develop over time, and the organisation will avoid becoming leader-centric.

Roles and structures have been created, which the organisation has grown into using. These have been dictated not only by our intentions, but by our experiences. While everything is functioning as it should, and while everything is outlined in the constitution, there still seems to be a need to put it in an explanatory form for persons who are already involved and those who wish to become involved with the movement and the organisation.

The members of the central organisational bodies should already be aware of how things should be functioning, but others may not be aware of what is expected of themselves or what they should expect from persons who play specific roles. Some persons may not be aware of roles that they could be playing in the organisation or the party if they wanted to.

This document seeks to make clarifications on the different roles that exist, and what is expected of those who play these roles. This should help persons to identify whether and exactly how they want to be involved with the organisation.

Background

What is LANDS?

In the broadest sense, LANDS is a political force that aims to build a platform to represent Socialist and other progressive (Communist, Pan-Africanist, Black Nationalist, Feminist, etc.) perspectives that are not often heard from the mainstream political parties or featured enough in the media.

LANDS is organised as a network of groups, and this network is intended to simultaneously function as a political party, a people's organisation, and a social movement:

- **The movement** is an informal entity in which groups of people meet together, exchange ideas, and rally around whatever is established as the consensus. Many persons participate in this process without officially being 'members' of LANDS, so many persons are rightly considered to be "in LANDS" in the sense that they are a part of the movement but are not necessarily members of the organisation.
- **The organisation** is a more formalised membership-based entity at the core of the movement. The members of the organisation pay dues and have the right to participate in internal processes that determine the leadership of the movement and the management of specific tasks to sustain the movement. Most members are not required to take on specific responsibilities, but they may volunteer to do so. The organisation is run by the Secretariat, a team that fulfils executive functions like handling records of meetings, facilitating communication between different groups in the movement, and coordinating projects conceptualised by the movement. The executive of the organisation therefore serves a technical rather than a political function.
- **The party** is the political aspect of the movement, consisting of the persons who are most trusted to represent the movement and whatever consensus is established. It is responsible for promoting the movement's perspectives and advocating for the movement's demands.

How Does LANDS Function?

The general process of things is that our members and supporters meet in groups, engage in political study, and discuss current affairs. As individuals, our thoughts and ideas are unorganised; bringing them to a group setting allows us to express our individual ideas so that they can be shared, assessed, critiqued, and debated. We engage in rigid debate about ideas when necessary, then put collective effort into organising those thoughts and ideas. Whenever we come to conclusions after discussing ideas or current affairs, we document them.

Our conclusions on a range of things can be turned into a political platform. When we formalise our thoughts and ideas, they can take the form of expressing our concerns, making general demands from the state, suggesting specific policies for the state to adopt, organising protest action, or even setting up our own projects to meet the needs of our communities and people where the state fails. We can turn to the 2 mainstream political parties and say “Hey, our organisation represents X number of people and this is what we want to see.”

Right now, we are not aligned to any of the mainstream political parties, and we do not lean more to one than to the other. We are critical of both parties, and we are willing to have discussions or debates with either of them. We may decide to enter national politics ourselves, but we will simply try to influence the main parties until then.

In the future, we may even consider seeking state power to form the government and implement our policies and ideas ourselves. We are not prepared to take on such a challenge right now, but we still consider an element of our force to be a political party because we are organised on the basis of having shared political perspectives and goals. Unlike an NGO that focuses on a specific area of policy, we have a general focus on the affairs of the society, the economy, and the state.

Whether we are in parliament or not, we can be a representative voice for our members and supporters. Through activism and other means, we can influence the political environment, so we see a point in organising our thoughts and ideas and doing work based on them.

History

Suggestion to Join the PNP

Historically, the PNP has been Jamaica's mainstream Left party, but they have gradually drifted from this tendency since the 1980s; as a result, there is no longer a real Left platform in Jamaica, nor any consistent representation of Leftist politics. There are still solid Left voices in the PNP, but they are drowned out by the leadership which is ideologically inconsistent and constantly willing to make concessions to wealthy donors and other Capitalists.

By forming ourselves as a separate entity, we can represent those Leftist voices which we know exist, as well as our own members and supporters who may have those views but not much faith in the PNP. Since our formation, we have been encouraged to become an affiliate organisation of the PNP, but this idea was shot down at the discussion stage in our meetings, failing to win any consensus, so it could not have been a sensible decision.

If we were to become an affiliate organisation of the PNP, the voices of our members would likely be drowned out by the other voices in the PNP. Our organisation maintains certain principles and standards that the PNP doesn't; it is necessary for them to avoid such restrictions because they want to be a big tent party. Anybody with any political views can join the PNP; the party that used to represent Democratic Socialism in Jamaica now has some persons who renounce its past and openly speak against Socialism, included the watered-down 'Democratic Socialism' that their former leader Michael Manley had pushed.

To avoid having our own voices drowned out, we choose to remain a distinct organisation from the PNP so that we can main our own political line that is independent of theirs. Still, we have tried to work with the PNP – especially those who lean more to the Left – since we have some common national goals. This isn't about competition or trying to be better than anyone; this is about knowing what our values and principles are, and then promoting those.

Working with the PNP

We have already been working with some elements in the PNP. We have maintained a good enough relationship with the PNPYO over the years, and we have had LANDS members who were invited to sit on the PNP's Policy Commission and/or the PNPYO's Policy Commission.

The contradictions between our stances and the stances of the PNP were sometimes evident in these bodies; there was a huge divide when discussing land in the PNPYO Policy Commission¹, and another huge divide when discussing healthcare in the PNP Policy Commission². More minor divides have come on topics like education and crime. The point is that we are not ideologically identical to the PNP or incapable of being critical of them.

We are most definitely not aligned to them, but their history of being on the Left makes it easier to establish common ground to walk on. For example, both LANDS and the PNP have strong relationships with the Communists and Socialists in Cuba and Venezuela.

Engagement of the State

We have taken multiple opportunities to engage the state and present our stances, including:

- a submission to the Ministry of Finance on the National Poverty Policy
- 2 submissions to the Ministry of Labour on the Minimum Wage
- a submission to the parliament on the Sexual Offences Act
- a submission to the Ministry of Finance on economic policy in 2018
- a submission to the parliament on the Customs Act
- a submission to the parliament on the Sexual Harassment Bill

We were invited to present our submission on the Sexual Offences Act to a parliamentary committee, in person. We were wary when the Minister of Justice and other members of the committee said that they didn't read the submissions made by 2 state agencies, and then shocked when they said that they had read ours. They asked a good bit of questions, knew the details of our submission out of memory, and gave us a considerable amount of speaking time.

We had a chance to engage the Minister of Finance and the governor of the central bank, after their participation in an event about reforms to how monetary policy will be done. The governor of the central bank took us seriously when we verbally expressed some concerns; without even knowing where we stood on some issues, he offered his own critique of rentier Capitalism which he says is limiting Jamaica and harming its economy.

¹ We ultimately triumphed in this heated debate, despite being the minority at first.

² We expressed wariness about insurance companies; we ended up opposing the Commission's conclusion.

We expressed concern to the Minister of Finance in writing rather than verbally, and he then met with him informally in person where he expressed interest in the organisation itself and the mere fact that it represents dozens of young adults.

We were invited to present our submission on the Sexual Harassment Bill in early 2020, where the joint select committee of parliament was divided on our proposal. We received validation and support for our perspective and recommendations from persons in both parties; we were supported by 2 government Senators even though we were opposed by the Minister of Justice.

Going Forward

We can see that we are taken seriously by major political actors, locally. We also have good ties with the governments of Cuba and Venezuela, through their diplomatic missions; we are developing similar ties with Nicaragua soon.

If we continue to remain organised, and to take ourselves seriously, we will continue to be taken seriously by other political actors. As we grow and represent more voices, we will have to be taken seriously by those who determine the country's policies.

This is all to say that the way we organise ourselves and the work we do isn't pointless. We are still a political party; our ideas and all our work are very political in nature, and we may seek state power in the future when we can, while we can at least influence who gets state power until then.

How to Become Involved

The movement consists of multiple groups that we call units. These groups hold informal meetings that anyone is free to attend and participate in. Most of the activity in LANDS really takes place in these groups.

Someone is required to be a part of one of these groups in order to become a member of the organisation or the party. Members of the organisation and the party must participate in these base-level units in the broader movement and are treated equal to everyone else including newcomers.

To be assigned to a group, you may simply show up to a meeting that you know is taking place. If you do not know about the meetings taking place, you can contact the organisation to put you in touch with one of the groups. If you want to change your group, you can tell the leader of your existing group or you can contact the organisation again.

Registration – Becoming an Observer

When you contact the organisation to be put in touch with a group, you will be asked to register as an observer. When we have you registered as an observer, we know that you want to participate in meetings and know what is going on, so we stay in touch with you.

An observer does not have any obligations; they are not required to pay membership fees or do any form of work for the organisation. It does not mean that you are a member of LANDS or that you are affiliated with LANDS; it can simply mean that you are curious about our discussions and you want to attend to see what they are like, and you are welcome to speak and contribute to the discussions when you want to.

The reason that we ask persons to register is so that we can put their contact info on a list to make it easier for the coordinators of the different groups to contact them. Some coordinators have groups that have around 20 persons, so it is easier for them to check a single place for an updated list of the persons they are responsible for contacting.

Your contact info is only given to the coordinator of the group that you are assigned to, and that coordinator is responsible for keeping in touch with you. The coordinator will inform of you of meetings so that you can attend them when you want to. A coordinator will contact everyone before each meeting and contact absentees after each meeting; please be courteous by responding to their efforts to communicate, as they do it so that no-one gets left out.

Membership

After being involved with the movement as an observer, you may want to become an official member of the organisation. Being a member allows someone to participate in internal votes on the organisation's constitution and leadership.

Requirements

As the organisation primarily operates in Jamaica, only persons who were born in Jamaica and/or those who live in Jamaica may become members. To become a member, you are required to fill out an application form which asks for your opinions on a range of issues. If you are sufficiently aligned with the movement's values, you are likely to be accepted.

Responsibilities

Membership doesn't come with any extraordinary responsibilities. You may still just attend meetings and participate in them like you did before as an observer, but it will be noted that you are someone who fits in with the ideology, who pays membership fees, and who has the right to vote in internal elections.

Up to this point, there has been some pressure on some of the existing members to volunteer to carry out tasks, because the membership is small. As more persons join and we have more persons to do these things, there will be less pressure because there will be a larger pool of persons to choose from.

Members aren't required to write articles, help with position papers, or anything like that; they are simply trusted to play a role in decisions made by the organisation. However, a member's actions should match up with their words at least somewhat. If a member, for example, believes that we need more articles to be written for the organisation's website, it would be odd if that member is not willing to write some articles or help with writing or editing them.

No-one will be kicked from the organisation for not doing any form of organisational work; you may retain membership as long as you have qualified for it, continue to pay membership fees, and attend meetings. We still appreciate members who don't necessarily do any form of work, because it helps to have a solid count of how much support we have, and it helps to have more sources of input in our positions and decisions. Some persons may be very well interested in certain projects being carried out, while being genuinely unable to help with such projects.

Tiers of Membership

There are 2 tiers of membership. Members of the upper tier are called partisans, and only they are allowed to become candidates in our internal elections. Members of the lower tier may be either cadet partisans or associate members.

Partisans are those who are deemed to be in line with the organisation's political ideology and who we expect to be the most committed to both political and non-political work. They are persons who seem interested and qualified to be involved in all areas of the organisation's work, even if they may choose to focus on only one or another. By default, they are considered to be a part of "the party" aspect of LANDS.

Cadet partisans are those who are more concerned with the national agenda and the political side of the organisation's work, but who need more training and guidance before we can promote them to be partisans. Cadet partisans are expected to discuss current affairs and to engage in some political study, as well as to give their opinions on policies that the political side of the organisation tries to develop.

Associate members are those who are more concerned with the non-political side of the organisation's work. Associate members meet in community units to mostly discuss current affairs, as well as the needs of their communities. Whereas partisans and cadet partisans discuss current affairs from a policy angle, associate members are more expected to discuss current affairs from more personal angles and identify how things are affecting their families and communities. We can carry out projects in certain communities if associate members deem such projects appropriate or necessary. Associate members are considered to be a part of the organisation aspect of LANDS, but not bound to "the party" aspect of it.

Starting a Unit

You don't have to be an insider of the organisation to start a new unit. We're always looking for new units to be started, whether small cadre units that consist of a handful of persons mostly focused on policy, or groups based in specific communities or areas who just want to discuss current affairs and have spaces for their opinions. Running a unit involves having a meeting at least once per month and submitting short reports on what took place these meetings. A unit only needs 1-2 persons to lead or coordinate it, not an entire executive team.

We also welcome existing groups and clubs to join us and we can integrate them into the existing network of units that we have. They do not need to change how they operate internally, and only 1 person from the group needs to be a full member, but they will still need to maintain certain standards or routines to be properly integrated so that the organisation can facilitate them better; if you are the leader of a group or club that wants to get involved with us, you may discuss/negotiate these details with the Secretariat.

The Secretariat provides a range of tools to assist with managing a unit. One of the tools provided is the Unit Guide, which outlines standards that units are expected to maintain as well as recommended practices to do so. The Unit Guide also further advises on the use of the other tools that are available to the coordinators of units.

Every unit has a list of persons who are assigned to it, as well as their contact information. The list is automatically updated; when the Secretariat makes a change to its master list, like moving someone from one unit to another or changing their contact information, the change is reflected in the unit's own list as well. Instead of being sent emails and having to maintain their own lists, each coordinator has a list that they can check without worrying that they forgot to update it.

There is even a tool for submitting meeting reports. Sometimes the idea of writing 'a report' is intimidating and persons don't know what is expected of them. Meeting reports are submitted through a form on the organisation's website that includes inputs for specific things, and instructions on how to fill it out. Units have access to each other's meeting reports, as well as meeting reports from committees and other bodies in the party. This allows them to see what other discussions are taking place; it may inspire your unit to discuss the same thing that another unit has discussed, to express similar or different opinions on a topic or to look at it from a different angle.

The leader of each unit is also automatically a member of the Organisation Committee, a place for unit leaders to interact with each other and directly make demands from the Secretariat or the rest of the organisation. From there, it is also easy for units to coordinate things together.

Organisational Structure

Units

As established, the units are the base of the movement and the organisation. Each person, whether a member or observer, is assigned to a specific unit. Units operate in a somewhat autonomous and decentralised fashion, but the organisation isn't just a loose association of these units.

The unit structure was developed because it would be impractical for all members and observers to gather together for meetings, even with our small size. Members and observers live in different parts of the island, and some even study or work abroad; in addition, we all have different schedules. As we get larger, there will be even more of a need for us to meet in subsets; when we reach 1000 members, it would be impractical for us to have monthly meetings where 1000 persons come together and are able to have meaningful participation in such meetings.

The point of meeting in units is so that everyone can be facilitated. We could have a large list of names of all the persons who registered at some point, and simply send them a generic newsletter every week, but this would not be genuine engagement. It would be difficult to keep track of who is actively involved or not, and who is even still interested. We could end up sending communiqués to persons who don't care to read them. A small well-organised clique would dominate the organisation in such a scenario, without proper facilitation of everyone.

Instead, we assign everyone to a unit. Every unit has a coordinator who is responsible for keeping in touch with everyone who is assigned to the unit. With this, we know who is active and who isn't. When someone is inactive, the coordinator can check up on them to find out the problem, whether it's transportation, family tragedy, conflicting schedules, lack of interest, or whatever else it may be. The coordinator can adjust the meeting time or location to accommodate as much persons as possible or recommend that someone be moved to another unit that may fit them more. This approach maximises attendance rates for meetings, and keeps persons engaged.

Once persons are attending meetings and having discussions on a range of topics, the coordinators submit meeting reports. Meeting reports show the agenda and the conclusions of each meeting; the agenda is a list of the general topics discussed in a meeting, while the conclusions are a summary of points that were made during the meeting. This somewhat leads to unorganised ideas being developed into organised ones, even if at a very basic level. When the coordinator of a unit submits a meeting report, the agenda and conclusions can be seen by other unit coordinators and certain persons in the organisation's leadership bodies. Most, if not all ideas, should really originate from a unit and then spread to other units and the organisation's leadership. Members should propose anything they want to see, and then the organisation's leadership could try to act on it.

Blocs

Units may come together to form blocs. A bloc is just a group of units that share something in common and want to band together for that reason. A bloc can be based on ideology, demographics, location, or whatever else. For example, 3 units in Clarendon could come together to form a Clarendon bloc, or 3 units of mostly women from Kingston could form a Kingston Women's bloc. Each bloc is entitled to elect its own delegates to the Central Committee.

Party Congress

About once per year, the organisation has an event called "the Party Congress" where delegates from each unit go to vote on amendments to the organisation's constitution, and to elect the organisation's leadership. Delegates vote to elect candidates to the Central Committee, and then the Politburo. Only delegates themselves can be candidates. It is fine if you don't understand this section very well; everyone will be guided through the process whenever it occurs.

Delegates vote within their blocs to elect candidates to the Central Committee, the general board of the organisation. If the Central Committee is supposed to have 25 members, and if there is a Western Jamaica bloc that accounts for roughly 20% of the members of the organisation, it would be entitled to have 5 persons on the Central Committee. Only the delegates from the Western Jamaica bloc would vote to decide the 5 persons who represent the Western Jamaica bloc.

A system of Approval Voting is used, which means that every voter will vote "yes" or "no" on each candidate, and the candidates with the most votes are the winners. If the hypothetical Western Jamaica bloc has 8 persons running for the 5 seats, the 5 candidates with the most votes will be elected to the Central Committee while the other 3 will be eliminated. The PNP uses a similar system to elect their Vice Presidents.

After the Central Committee is elected, its new members may choose to run for the Politburo, the leadership of the political element of the organisation; Approval Voting is used for this as well, but everyone votes together, rather than in blocs, to elect the Politburo. If the Politburo has 7 positions, and 11 persons are candidates, then the 7 candidates with the most votes will be elected while the other 4 are eliminated. The candidate with the highest approval chair the Politburo and therefore be the official leader of the party.

Central Committee

The Central Committee is elected by the Party Congress that is held each year. It is the general 'board' of the organisation. It is responsible for appointing the Secretariat and acting as an oversight body for the organisation's management and resources. It is concerned with both the political and non-political elements of the organisation. All members of the Central Committee must still participate in their respective units within the movement because the Central Committee itself is not a unit.

Politburo

The Politburo is the collective leadership body of the political element of the organisation; it is therefore the leadership of "the party" aspect of LANDS. All members of the Politburo are also members of the Central Committee, since someone must be a member of the Central Committee in order to be a candidate for the Politburo. Members of the Politburo must still participate in their respective units within the movement, because the Politburo itself is not a unit.

The Politburo's role is representing the views of the movement, especially the members of the organisation, and speaking on their behalf. The Politburo makes political decisions and has the authority to decide the organisation's official stances or policies on political matters. The head of the Politburo is the Chairman/Chairperson, who is also the spokesperson and de facto leader of the party. The Chairman/Chairperson possesses veto power in votes that are done within the Politburo but cannot unilaterally make decisions without the Politburo's consent.

The Politburo is expected to take the views of the organisation's members into account before making decisions or declaring public stances. Members of the Politburo who take unpopular stances are at risk of losing their positions, as the organisation's members are the ones who elect them every year.

Sometimes the entire organisation does not have time to discuss an issue before the Politburo needs to come to a position, so it may come to its own position on things without consultation in cases where it needs to urgently declare a stance. This means that Members of the Politburo need to have the trust and confidence of the members of the organisation.

Policy Committees

The Politburo is responsible for declaring the party's stances in general, but it may devolve some of this power to policy committees. For example, it appointed an Economic Policy Committee to help to develop economic policies and to help to decide the party's stances on economic policies.

Whereas units are groups based on affinity who just meet out of convenience to have general discussions, members of policy committees are specially appointed by the Politburo because they are trusted to guide the party's policies in specific areas of interest or expertise. Members of policy committees are still regular persons in the party who must participate in their respective units.

Policy Committees may develop things that originate from the units, or they may initiate conversations and hope that the units express their opinions on them. For example, units may talk about their concerns about some of the government's policies on duties and tariffs charged by customs, and the Economic Policy Committee could then take up the task of developing a proposal to amend those policies. On the flipside, the Economic Policy Committee can take note of a specific economic issue that the party's members aren't focusing on and recommend that the party's members share their understandings of the topic and/or give their opinions and views.

The Secretariat

The Secretariat is the executive body that manages the organisation, especially its routine functions. The Secretariat consists of Secretaries and officers. Each Secretary oversees a portfolio and may have a committee of officers who assist with the portfolio.

The general membership of the party, represented by the Central Committee and the Politburo, will decide what needs to be done. The Secretariat is the body that is responsible for getting those things done. For example, if the organisation's members decide that there needs to be some sort of public campaign on a certain issue, the Secretariat is responsible for organising and executing it.

The head of the Secretariat may be called the First Secretary or the Secretary-General. Whereas the Chairman is the 'leader' of the party, the head of the Secretariat is the 'manager' of the party; it could also be said that the Chairman is the 'head of the party' while the head of the Secretariat is the 'head of the organisation' – the Chairman's function is mostly political and representative, whereas the head of the Secretariat has a more bureaucratic and managerial function.

Members of the Secretariat are still regular persons in the party who are expected to participate in their respective units.

Executive Committees

A member of the Secretariat may have a committee of persons to assist them with their responsibilities. The Communications Committee is chaired by the Secretary of Communications, for example, but also consists of the Publications Officer, the Social Media Officer, and other persons without specific responsibilities who suggest ideas or give feedback on ideas that are brought to the committee.

If the scale of LANDS' work gets large enough, it could be necessary to form subcommittees. For example, the Publications Officer could ask to form a Publications Committee that has different persons working on different types of publications for LANDS. If there is a Secretary of Projects who has a Projects Committee, a particular intensive project could require its own committee and separate meetings; in such a case, the main coordinator of the project could sit on and report to the Projects Committee where projects are discussed in general, but also maintain his own committee that exclusively discusses his project.

Policy Committees can be considered to be subcommittees of the Policy Coordination portfolio, as the Policy Coordination Committee just generally assists the Secretary of Policy Coordination but a specific committee may exist for each area of policy.

Principles

First Point of Contact

All members and observers are assigned to units, and each unit has a coordinator. When you are assigned to a unit, the coordinator is your first point of contact for all matters relating to the organisation. Communication should be done through the unit coordinators; if you do not know who your unit coordinator is, or if you are not comfortable with your unit coordinator, then you need to get in touch with the Secretariat to resolve that.

The principle of establishing a “first point of contact” is not about elitism; the point is to prevent overburdening a handful of persons with the responsibility to maintain communication with all members of the entire organisation. We want to avoid overwhelming the persons in the central organisation bodies with repetitive communications. The party leadership and the persons in the central organisation bodies are also regular members who participate in unit meetings and discuss their ideas there first.

If the organisation has 400 persons, it is impossible for the party leadership to maintain quality communication with all 400 persons at once. It is better to have 20 units with 20 persons in each unit, so each unit leader would only need to keep directly in touch with 20 persons, and the party leadership would only need to keep directly in touch with the leaders of the 20 units. This makes communication smoother, avoids bottlenecks, and allows faster responses.

Though the organisation isn't this large yet, it is large enough to require practising this. The handful of persons in the party leadership cannot constantly stay directly in touch with the dozens of persons involved with the movement. If we are to grow, we can't have inefficient methods of communication consuming our time. Efficient communication saves time.

Asking Questions

If you have any questions about internal organisation matters, direct them to the coordinator of the unit that you're assigned to. If everyone sent questions to the party leadership and Secretariat, that would be a large pool for them to handle; it is better to have them filtered through the unit coordinators, since each unit coordinator has a smaller pool of persons from which questions may come from. It's easier to respond to 10 persons with 10 questions each, than to respond to 100 persons with 1 question each.

You may find that others in your unit have similar questions. Additionally, unit coordinators may already know the answer to your questions without having to ask the Secretariat or the party leadership for an answer.

Making Suggestions

If you have any ideas or suggestions, bring them up to the coordinator of the unit that you have been assigned to. This should be discussed in the unit. When the unit submits a meeting report, it can be seen by other units in the movement, the organisation's executive, and the party leadership.

This applies to all ideas, not just discussions on ideology and policy. For example, if you have a suggestion on how the organisation can do better at public relations, it is not necessary to directly go to the Public Relations Officer or the Secretary of Communication. If you have a suggestion for changes to how we organise the units or the whole organisation itself, it isn't necessary to go directly to the party leadership or the Secretariat.

If you fail to discuss an idea in your unit first, don't be surprised if it gets shot down. Discussing it in your unit is a good way to develop the idea and to even possibly gather support for it so that there will be greater pressure on the party leadership and central bodies to seriously consider it. It is also a way to ensure that your proposal or idea is recorded somewhere. There is no established practice of executive members recording suggestions that are made to them in a 1-on-1 chat with someone else, but there is an obligation for the coordinator of each unit to document the ideas and stances expressed by the persons in the unit.

Meeting Attendance

Unit coordinators are required to communicate with persons to set a reasonable meeting time, as well as to inform persons of when meetings will be held. When a meeting is announced, especially if the unit coordinator asks who will attend, you should be courteous by confirming whether you will attend or not.

If you are absent from a meeting, the unit coordinator is required to state a reason for your absence. For this reason, a unit coordinator will contact you after a meeting if they do not know why you were absent. Please co-operate by responding when the unit coordinator tries to communicate with you.

If you are unable to make it to a unit's meetings, but you still want to stay involved with the organisation, let it be known so that you can be re-assigned to another unit. If you are taking a break from the organisation, let your unit coordinator know.

If you lack interest in continuing to be involved in the organisation, let it be known so that we can remove you from your records instead of having our unit coordinators trying to stay in touch with you and being puzzled about why you do not respond.

Taking Positions

Rather than hastily taking a position on everything, we should be grounded in principles and some sense of purpose. Things should be given thorough consideration before we take hardline positions on them. There should be principles and procedures which guide us in how we organise our ideas, take positions, and make decisions.

Expressing Views Publicly

One thing that has become common in politics is that persons in the main political parties hastily express views on topics which may not represent their party or their people. When a high-ranking member of a party says something, it is often interpreted as the position of the party.

In both mainstream politics and among activists, some individuals have become so caught up in their egos that they believe that expressing their personal views is how they participate in politics; they see no need to consult a collective body, to subject their views to critique, or to consider other perspectives before platforming their own.

We should be aware of these tendencies and try to correct ourselves and each other. Rather than engaging in public debates with each other, where we wash our dirty laundry in public, we should facilitate rigid internal discussions before making strong public expressions on some issues; this especially applies to expressing stances or positions on specific policies or issues.

We have seen members of major parties contradict each other publicly, as well as individual members going off on their own – with the platform they have from their parties – to express personal views on matters which they haven't given much thought. Additionally, some persons may get so emotionally invested in their views that they may want to leave the party as soon as the party disagrees with them on something.

Disagreements should be handled internally, and persons are best to discuss their ideas and thoughts with other persons involved with the organisation rather than hastily taking their opinions to their public platforms. Someone is less likely to change their view on something after expressing it publicly, because they will have some level of pride and defensiveness, even defending a mistaken position.

If we are to take our internal debates to the public sphere, it may give an impression of unmanageable disunity if the discussion gets too heated, whereas we should be able to handle heated discussions internally. Internal discussions are about ideas and perspectives, whereas public discussions can end up being about image and ego.

This is not all to say that we must all agree on something before expressing it publicly, but we should know where each other stands on a topic before expressing our views publicly rather than surprising each other in the public domain and arguing in front of people. There will still be internal disagreement and sometimes we may express different views publicly, but our disagreements in public should be handled better.

Soliciting support for a particular perspective or idea will help you in the public sphere. If you say something publicly, and nobody understands where you are coming from, you may either face backlash or get ignored. If you have Comrades in LANDS who understand the idea that you are promoting in the public sphere, you will have persons to help to defend your points if you face backlash or opposition. Even if you do not face backlash or opposition, the mere sight of others coming out to support what you are saying may build your credibility or influence persons who were neutral before to see things your way; this is a perk of being organised. If your idea is not welcomed by others in LANDS, you can simply treat LANDS as a testing ground for the ideas before you decide to go public with them.

Even the official stance of the movement or party itself may not get the agreement of all its members and supporters; the party can publicly acknowledge that a range of views exist while being clear about the official stance. The official stances of the party should be decided after consultation of its members and other supporters in the first place.

Proper Investigation

Sometimes persons rely on their ego, including their confidence and reputation, to give weight to their point. We will not necessarily hold the masses or even the supporters of our movement to the same standard, but the members of our party in particular should demonstrate some sense of discipline. Partisans should properly educate themselves on an issue before confidently making certain claims. Sometimes, even with some investigation of an issue, persons fail to analyse issues properly to come to correct conclusions.

Chairman Mao warned about both tendencies, saying “many of our comrades do not want to go deeply into complex matters, to analyse and study them over and over again, but like to draw simple conclusions which are either absolutely affirmative or absolutely negative.”³ One good practice was enforcing that “Unless you have investigated a problem, you will be deprived of the right to speak on it.”⁴

³ Our Study and the Current Situation (Z. Mao 1944)

⁴ Oppose Book Worship (Z. Mao 1930)

The Mass Line

The principle of the Mass Line is that all correct ideas come from the masses. We are not to assume that we are smarter than the masses or that our role is to liberate them; the masses will liberate themselves.

The role of LANDS is to facilitate organisation. The masses are not an organisation, so their ideas are not organised, but they exist. We have an obligation to go out, engage the people, ensure we are on the same page as the people, and then turn their unorganised ideas into organised ones. We can develop convergence of multiple perspectives, eliminate errors like misguided frustrations, and analyse complex problems in their entirety by knowing exactly how the people are affected and what their concerns are.

It would be beneficial for partisans and cadet partisans to pay attention to the concerns and stances expressed by associate members and others who participate in the meetings within the movement. We are not a movement of academics who are detached from the people's reality; we are a group of persons who use our knowledge and skills to organise to serve the people.

Democratic Centralism

There is a need for some sense of Democratic Centralism in the party. Democratic Centralism is where issues are discussed freely and openly within the party's structures in a democratic manner, but where everyone commits to upholding the position that is decided by the conclusion of those discussions. It is necessary for there to be unity in action, even if there is diversity in opinion.

Of course, we can't just say "there should be unity in action" and expect it to magically happen. If members of the party's committees and leadership want to encourage unity in action, it is best for them to properly listen to the views expressed by the members and supporters of the party, as well as the persons who participate in the community organisations and the wider movement, to gain their confidence in whatever decisions are made. If the majority view is ignored, the process will be undemocratic. If the views of a significant minority are ignored, it will be difficult to gain full confidence in the final decision which is based on the majority view.

Democratic Centralism does not mean that the party's stance is final once it is decided. Persons may still challenge the party line within the party itself, as criticism should always be welcome in the party from both members of the party and persons who participate in the meetings held by the groups in the movement. Externally, however, the party line should be obeyed for the sake of unity and overall effectiveness. We need to develop a culture of self-criticism, but we need to also be careful about how we got about criticism and self-criticism.

Connecting Theory and Praxis

A mistake that many Left parties have made, in both the Caribbean and other regions, is to treat ideology like dogma. The unfortunate result of this is that those who are informed by ideology but still maintain scientific analysis are sometimes prejudged as being dogmatic. We are to avoid being dogmatic; instead, we must constantly remember why we study and develop theory and ideology.

We must not study just for the sake of studying and knowing things. The point of our political study is not to show off our vocabulary or demonstrate some grand sense of intellect. We study to understand historical context, to develop our analysis of our past and our present conditions, and to empower ourselves to develop our own solutions to the problems that we identify. Our ultimate goals revolve around the liberation of our people, and our studies must be towards those ends.

If our actions are not grounded in some principles or any ideology, then they will be disorganised and inconsistent. If the main purpose of our study isn't to develop realistic solutions to real problems that our people face, then it is an academic hobby that serves no purpose to our cause.

Studying is still important. However, we must constantly know why we study what we study; it will give our studies more meaning and help us to better manage our time and efforts.

Ideological Struggle

Do not shy away from substantive debates for the sake of maintaining abstract notions of peace and unity that ignore real differences. The best way to achieve unity is to come to agreement or at least mutual understanding, not to pretend to agree with something while disagreeing in secret.

Chairman Mao said that “We stand for active ideological struggle because it is the weapon for ensuring unity within the Party and the revolutionary organizations in the interest of our fight. Every Communist and revolutionary should take up this weapon. But liberalism rejects ideological struggle and stands for unprincipled peace, thus giving rise to a decadent, Philistine attitude and bringing about political degeneration in certain units and individuals in the Party and the revolutionary organizations. Liberalism manifests itself in various ways. To let things slide for the sake of peace and friendship when a person has clearly gone wrong, and refrain from principled argument because he is an old acquaintance, a fellow townsman, a schoolmate, a close friend, a loved one, an old colleague or old subordinate. Or to touch on the matter lightly instead of going into it thoroughly, so as to keep on good terms. The result is that both the organization and the individual are harmed.”⁵

⁵ Combat Liberalism (Mao 1937)

We are not following this just because Chairman Mao said it. We follow it because we know how it can harm collective spaces when persons smile with each other on the surface while harbouring serious disagreement or other issues. Rather than being resolved, these frustrations lead to persons feeling alienated from the organisation, or they may even resort to gossip in other spaces if there is no quality discussion or resolution of issues in our own collective spaces.

We are not saying that there should be pedantic arguments about every fine detail or that you should raise your objection to something as soon as you hear it; you can note and dissect what someone has said, and then respond to their entire argument in detail without interrupting them constantly to derail the conversation at every minor disagreement.

We are also not saying that there should be arguments for the sake of having arguments; this would be reckless and there is no need to play devil's advocate about anything. Sometimes a debate may get unnecessarily heated, or sometimes persons may be frustrated with the time spent on something. In moments like these, we can take a step back, assess what important questions there are to answer and what is really necessary to come to a common position on, and then the discussion can be postponed, i.e. rescheduled for a future meeting of the same body, rather than scrapped. Persons can then move on to discuss another issue for the rest of the meeting.

Respect

Openness and Honesty

There should be openness and honesty among persons involved in the organisation. When you have a problem with someone, voice it to that person or in the relevant body with that person present, or at least in a body where your criticisms are relevant and where a record of what you have said will be available to the person. Do not gossip behind others' backs, do not huff and puff and mutter while saying nothing, and do not 'throw shade' or engage in passive-aggressive behaviour. Those who engage in these petty behaviours should be criticised for it.

Sometimes direct confrontation between person X and person Y may worsen things. In such a case, a person Z can be brought into the mix to help to resolve things as a sort of mediator. X can complain to Z about problems that X is having with Y, but only if the intention is for Z to openly confront Y and tell them everything that X has said. This is about issues like persons not necessarily getting along, or someone doing something that offends someone, not issues like abuse or other serious harm.

Styles of Reference

It is not necessary for persons in LANDS to use someone's organisational role when referring directly to them, whether in person or by digital means. If someone is the Chairman, there is no need to say "Chairman [Surname]" or "Mister Chairman" or "Comrade Chairman" when you can simply refer to the person by their name.

Everyone should be simply referred to by their given name or a pseudonym that they may prefer, but we are all equal and the roles that we fulfil are things we do as functions and duties, not things that place us above others or require us to be seen with some special status.

Someone's title is only relevant when they are fulfilling a responsibility related to the position that they hold. The Chairman of LANDS is only the Chairman in the Politburo. When the Chairman attends a regular unit meeting, he is just a regular member and has no authority as Chairman. He can only use his title when officially representing LANDS with the permission of the Politburo.

It is normal in certain Socialist spaces for persons to call each other "Comrade" – it will be neither encouraged nor discouraged within LANDS. Sometimes "Comrade" in the second person can come off as patronising⁶ or overly formalistic unless you genuinely do not know someone's name, whereas in the third person (referring to someone else when speaking to someone) is always fine.

⁶ In both senses of the word: the condescending authoritative sense and the sycophantic sense.

Obligation and Expectations

Obligation should always be understood as contextual and conditional. One's obligation to another, or a sense that someone is expected to do something, is based on that person agreeing to fulfil certain responsibilities.

Most of the interactions involving some sort of expectation occur in the Secretariat or its committees. Most 'orders' are given to the executive body of the organisation by other persons in the executive body of the organisation. Tasks should be in the scope of the work that the person who received it had agreed to do. For example:

- The Secretary of Policy Coordination can issue an order to the Secretary of Organisation to pass on a message to the Organisation Committee, asking unit leaders to discuss a particular issue in their respective units. This is based on the fact that whoever agreed to be the Secretary of Organisation had done so after knowing that passing information between the Secretariat and unit leaders is one of their main duties.
- The First Secretary can decide to issue an order to the Secretary of Communications to draft a press release that captures LANDS' position on a particular issue. This is based on the fact that whoever agreed to be the Secretary of Communications had done so after knowing that external communication and public relations are among the things that they are responsible for managing.

Expectations should not be held of anyone who did not agree to take on certain responsibilities or duties. An agreement to take on certain responsibilities, however, does not mean they are being subjected to some form of indentureship. Someone may refuse to do something, even within the scope of their responsibilities, but should communicate it clearly to the person who told them to do it so that that person will not be waiting indefinitely and expecting it to be done. Someone who has agreed to take on responsibilities has the obligation to at least respond when something is asked or demanded of them so that the person making the demand knows what to expect.

Non-Discrimination

Many people involved in the organisation may be of different backgrounds. We understand that some persons are raised with different personal, religious, or otherwise cultural beliefs, and that different persons may have different lifestyles and values, but we expect everyone to conduct themselves in a respectful manner to each other.

We do not welcome discrimination based on race, gender identity, religion/faith, sexual orientation, etc. – while we often keep our meeting spaces casual, we still expect a certain level of professional conduct, especially from our members, towards our members and observers.

Readings

There are readings you may find to be helpful for your involvement in the organisation or movement. The organisation's website⁷ has multiple reading lists that you can check out and make use of. There may be changes to the lists as time passes. The most important list for a beginner to read is the "Basic Readings" list, especially if you want to become a member.

You do not have to do all the readings at once. You are not required to read any of them before becoming an observer, or all of them before becoming a member. You aren't even required to read all of them before running in the organisation's internal elections, but they would help with your involvement in the organisation.

After becoming a member, you should try your best to ensure that you have read all of the readings on the "Basic Readings" list, and then you can go on to read the things on the "Intermediate Readings" list or any of the other lists. You may read these at your own pace; there is no need to rush to try to read all of them but reading them will benefit you and increase the value of your contributions to the organisation.

You are not required to agree with everything, or even most things, that you read. You may feel free to disagree with the things that are said in the readings; you can express these disagreements in your own writings, or in meetings where readings are being discussed. As you read more, you will develop your own understanding and be able to make analyses with more quality.

⁷ Readings (Jamaica LANDS n.d.)

References

Jamaica LANDS. n.d. *Readings*. <https://www.jalands.org/politedu/readings/>.

Mao. 1937. "Combat Liberalism." *Marxists Internet Archive*. September 7. Accessed January 2016. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_03.htm.

Mao, Zedong. 1930. "Oppose Book Worship." *Marxists Internet Archive*. May. Accessed 2017. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_11.htm.

—. 1944. "Our Study and the Current Situation." *Marxists Internet Archive*. April 12. Accessed October 2018. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_18.htm.