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THE TRANSITION IN LEADERSHIP OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

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This discussion bulletin is divided into three components.

1) Memorandums by Farrell Dobbs and George Breitman on the leadership question which were submitted to the National Committee members prior to the May 1972 plenum of the Socialist Workers Party. (PP. 3-8.)

2) Transcripts of the reports by Farrell Dobbs, Jack Barnes, and George Novack presented to the May 1972 National Committee plenum proposing election of national officers, changes in National Committee membership, and the election of the Political Committee and an alteration in the structure of the Political Committee. (PP. 8-15.)

3) Comments on the selection of the National Committee by James P. Cannon, written from Sandstone Prison in 1944 and adopted as the Nominating Commission procedure at the 1944 convention and all subsequent ones. (PP. 16-19)

These items are submitted to the party in the 1973 preconvention discussion period to better acquaint party members with the opinions of several of the party leaders on the problems and responsibilities of the transition in leadership of the party at this stage of its development.

In addition it might be helpful for the comrades to review, prior to the convention, the material on the leadership question available in "Problems of Leadership Selection and Leadership Structure," by Farrell Dobbs (Internal Information Bulletin, April 1969—40 cents), "The Structure and Organizational Principles of the Party," by Farrell Dobbs (Education for Socialists Bulletin—65 cents), and "The Organizational Character of the Socialist Workers Party," Resolution adopted by the 21st National Convention of the Socialist Workers Party, September 1965 (Education for Socialists Bulletin—35 cents).

Jack Barnes
April 29, 1973

MEMORANDUM ON THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION
by Farrell Dobbs, November 16, 1971

I.

Little progress was made at the last party convention in carrying forward the necessary transitions in leadership.

Of the 28 regular members on the outgoing National Committee, 27 stood for reelection; one asked to be changed to advisory membership on the committee. The Nominating Commission included the 27 candidates for reelection on its slate of regular members and it recommended concurrence with the request for a change to advisory status. A young comrade, who had been in the fifth position on the outgoing alternate list, was nominated to fill the single vacancy on the slate of regular members. As a result of this situation the 28 regular members of the incoming National Committee include only nine young comrades; the remaining 19 comrades all fall within the middle and older age ranges.

Elevation of a former alternate to regular NC membership created one opening on the outgoing alternate list. The Nominating Commission made additional places on the list by deciding not to renominate four relatively young comrades who were among the outgoing alternates. These five vacancies on the alternate list were filled by putting on the slate young comrades new to the NC. The remaining 17 outgoing alternates were renominated but changes were recommended in the order of priorities. All comrades in the older age ranges on the slate of alternates were reduced to a lower position in the order of priorities than they had previously held; none were ranked higher than the ninth position on the incoming alternate list. All the younger comrades who had been on the outgoing alternate list were elevated to a higher position in the order of priorities than they had previously held; five of them were included within the first eight positions on the alternate list. Of the five young comrades who were newly nominated as alternate NC members, three were included within the first eight position on the alternate list; all three have been playing prominent roles in party work. About a dozen other young comrades, who have been outstanding in their party activity, were favorably considered by the Nominating Commission, but there was no room for any of them on the slate of alternate NC members.

As this brief description shows, several basic problems are reflected in the specific situation faced by the Nominating Commission at the last party convention. More room is needed to include younger comrades in the regular membership category of the National Committee. This lack has greatly intensified competition for places on the NC alternate list. Contests for position in the order of priorities on the list have also grown sharper. This tight situation may have been a factor in the decision not to renominate some younger comrades among the outgoing alternates. It is true, of course, that such action may be entirely in order on the basis of the party's appraisal of the relative leadership capacity of a given comrade. If, however, competition for places on the committee is

exceedingly stiff, tests of the relative merits of comrades can become prematurely exacting, not leaving enough time to fully assess the pluses and minuses of a given comrade's role. Yet another result of the tightness of the alternate list is an inordinate delay in bringing onto the NC for the first time young comrades who show outstanding leadership qualities.

The Nominating Commission is not to be blamed for failing to cope more effectively with these basic problems; it simply did the best it could in a complex situation. Similarly, the convention itself ratified the entire slate as presented by the Nominating Commission, considering it the best that could be done under the given conditions. By implication the convention was leaving it to the incoming National Committee to take the lead in finding a way to solve the difficulties. It is thus up to the NC to think out the desired solution in terms of the party's basic criteria on the leadership question and the application of these criteria in carrying forward the necessary transitions in party leadership.

II.

A balanced approach to the leadership question was summed up in the 1965 convention resolution recodifying the party's organizational principles: "Sustained party activity, not broken or disrupted by abrupt and disorienting changes, presupposes not only a continuity of tradition and a systematic development of party policy, but also the continuity of leadership. It is an important sign of a serious and firmly constituted party, of a party really engaged in productive work in the class struggle, that it raises from its ranks cadres of more or less able leading comrades, tested for their qualities of endurance and trustworthiness, and that it thus insures a certain stability and continuity of leadership by such a cadre.

"Continuity of leadership does not, however, signify the automatic self-perpetuation of leadership. Constant renewal of its ranks by means of additions and, when necessary, replacements, is the only assurance the party has that its leadership will not succumb to the effects of dry-rot, that it will not be burdened with dead-wood, that it will avoid the corrosion of conservatism and dilettantism, that it will not be the object of conflict between the older elements and the younger, that the old and basic cadre will be refreshed by new blood, that the leadership as a whole will not become purely bureaucratic 'committeemen' remote from the real life of the party and the activities of the rank and file."

To meet these tests a principal characteristic of the National Committee must be its capacity to lead the party in action. Generally speaking, NC members must have close working relations with party activists and the committee as a whole must be in step with the party ranks. Such a relationship creates a sense of oneness between membership and leadership, thereby enabling the plenum of the NC to reflect the internal realities of the party as a whole. It also facilitates objective efforts to provide oppor-

tunities for young comrades to develop their leadership potential. This results in a continuous process of leadership selection as young comrades prove themselves in the eyes of the party ranks. The preconditions are thus established for infusions of new blood into the NC. These infusions in turn help to safeguard the party's internal equilibrium and to assure its capacity to intervene dynamically in the class struggle.

In bringing young comrades onto the National Committee it is important to avoid any rupture in the continuity of leadership. For that reason the June 1962 plenum initiated an advisory membership category within the NC. The aim was to make room for younger activists on the committee and at the same time enable them to have the help and advice of older leaders who were becoming less active. This concept was formalized in the party constitution as follows: "Article V, Section 3, Paragraph 3. Regular members who have served on the National Committee for an extended period and are no longer able to be fully active may be designated as advisory members." As initially conceived, this membership form was intended to apply where a comrade who had long been a regular member would continue to play an advisory role within the NC itself. It was not introduced as a means of providing lifetime association with the NC for comrades who had once been regular members of that body. The advisory form was designed simply as a means of helping to maintain continuity of leadership while carrying through a process of transition.

Also to be kept in mind concerning the continuity factor are the abilities developed by younger comrades through their experience as leaders. These comrades are becoming well schooled in party tradition and they show increasing capabilities of contributing to systematic development of party policy. As a consequence they, too, are becoming a factor in maintaining a continuity of leadership within the party. Moreover, these young comrades are shouldering leadership responsibilities to an ever greater degree and they are entitled to commensurate voice within official party bodies.

All things considered, continuity of leadership is not the central problem at the present stage of party development. At the last party convention the continuity factor received thoughtful attention. The bind faced by the Nominating Commission arose from the paucity of room for further transitions in leadership. Finding the necessary leeway for these transitions becomes all the more imperative in the light of changing objective conditions. New areas of influence and greater opportunities for political action are opening up for the party. Our movement is expanding geographically as well as numerically. Organizational aspects of party work are assuming an increasingly complex nature, bringing in their wake new administrative problems. Care must, therefore, be taken to assure that the required involvement of NC members extends to all spheres of mass work. In similar vein there is the matter of appropriate representation on the top party committee of competent leaders from the various sectors of the developing mass radicalization. Also to be taken into account in selecting the committee is the case of leading comrades who play specialized roles, such as editors and educators.

On the whole these considerations require more room for overall changes in the composition of the National

Committee than existed at the last party convention.

III.

Infusions of new blood into the National Committee represent only one form in which the transitions in party leadership should be carried forward. Parallel steps are needed in the selection of national officers by the NC. Toward the latter end the older central leaders have sought to advance the development of younger party leaders by providing them opportunities to assume increasing executive responsibilities. A key instrument for this has been the post of national organization secretary which in recent years has assumed a dual aspect. In one sense it has served as a means for a necessary division of labor within the party's executive leadership. At the same time it has helped to intensify the leadership training of younger comrades holding the post. A major aim of the educational process has been preparation for a leadership transition involving the post of national secretary, which has been viewed traditionally as the party's central executive office.

Three years ago Comrade Jack Barnes was elected to the post of national organization secretary. Since then he has gradually been assuming the national secretary's responsibilities, doing so with my encouragement and cooperation, as well as that of other leading comrades. The transition has now been completed, more or less, on a de facto basis. This was demonstrated when he functioned, in effect, as acting national secretary at the last party convention. As the party is aware from that experience and others, he has shown that he can meet such responsibilities competently.

This new stage of leadership transition should be made formal at the next plenum of the National Committee. At that time I propose to nominate Comrade Jack Barnes to replace me in the post of national secretary.

With such a change in status, executive initiative would be left primarily to him. My role would be to help him on a consultative basis, proceeding along the general lines of cooperative effort we have developed during the transitional process. Since no specific party office is necessary for that function, I should simply be relieved from my present post as national secretary. That would help to maintain flexibility in the formal administrative apparatus, so that active leading comrades could be designated to various national posts according to party needs in these changing times.

IV.

In view of the modifications in my function within the party leadership I propose to ask at the next plenum for a change in status on the National Committee from regular to advisory membership. My request for advisory status is based on the continuation of a consultative role within the NC itself. Thus it is in accord with the initial concept of that status as a means of maintaining continuity within the party leadership while carrying through the transitional process.

When the advisory category was first introduced in 1962 it was established that the plenum has the authority to make such a change. This authority stems from the fact that the plenum would simply be ratifying a volun-

tary act on my part. Also validating such procedure is the consideration that a change of the kind would constitute merely a shift in the overall form of the NC elected by the last party convention. Though a valid and operative interim act by the NC, it would, of course, remain subject to verification by the next party convention.

Such an interim step would create in advance of the next convention an opening for the elevation of an alternate to regular membership on the National Committee. This in turn would assure a vacant place on the alternate list to be filled by the next convention. In both instances the desired transitions in party leadership would be facilitated.

V.

A consultative leadership role involves collaboration with the Political Committee as well as the National Committee. In the case of comrades who have long been part of the executive apparatus at the party center, it is best that their consultative relations with the PC assume some concrete form. As a matter of fact improvisations toward that end have already taken place.

At the 1969 party convention Comrade Tom Kerry requested and was accorded a change in NC status from regular to advisory membership. This change came about after he had long been playing a key executive role in the party. That being the case, the NC reached an understanding that Comrade Kerry would participate informally in PC meetings, even though he was not an elected member of the latter body. A further improvisation along the same lines led to his being recorded in the minutes as casting a consultative vote when there was a division within the PC on a question.

My proposed change in National Committee status would place me in the same situation as Comrade Kerry. Similar considerations are implied concerning other older comrades on the Political Committee who have been playing major leadership roles. They, too, will no doubt be thinking about possible changes in their formal committee status in the course of the unfolding transitions in party leadership. From this it follows that specific measures should be taken to formalize consultative relations with the PC in such cases. Workable measures of the kind needed are already suggested by the PC experience since Comrade Kerry became an advisory NC member.

It seems in order for the National Committee to establish a consultative membership category as part of the Political Committee. Comrades in that category would have voice in the PC but only consultative vote. Since

the party is presently functioning with an elected PC, consultative members should be included in that body only as elected to it in that capacity by the NC.

As the parent body the National Committee has full authority at all times to modify the Political Committee structure in any way it sees fit. To repeat a foregoing point, the National Committee is also authorized to approve between party conventions voluntary requests for a change from regular to advisory membership status within the NC itself. Use of these powers along the lines suggested should help to clear the way for more meaningful action at the next party convention in carrying forward the necessary transitions in party leadership.

STATISTICAL BREAKDOWN OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE ELECTED AT 1971 SWP CONVENTION

Prepared by Farrell Dobbs, November 16, 1971

<i>NC</i>	regular:	older	4	middle	15	younger	9
	alternate:				8		14
	combined:		4		23		23
<i>regular</i>	older:	Breitnam, Dobbs, J. Hansen, Novack					
	middle:	Chertov, Coover, DeBerry, Garza, Halstead, A. Hansen, Himmel, Johnson, F. Lovell, Ring, Sharon, Shaw, Tussey, Weinstein, Weissman					
	younger:	Barnes, Britton, P. Camejo, Horowitz, Jenness, Jones, Sheppard, Stone, Waters					
<i>alternate</i>	middle:	Henderson (1 to 9), Scheer (2 to 10); Montauk (8 to 12), S. Lovell (7 to 13), Leonard (11 to 16), Sell (14 to 17), Kirsh (12 to 18), Edwards (19 to 20)					
	younger:	Bolduc (3 to 1), Morrison (6 to 2), Wulp (13 to 5), Styron (9 to 6), Benson (10 to 7), Thomas (17 to 11), Scott (15 to 14), Evans (20 to 15), Roberts (22 to 21)					
	added:	Seigle (3), White (4), Lipman (8), T. Camejo (19), Pulley (22)					
	dropped:	Boutelle, Hill, Porter, Vernon					
<i>advisory:</i>		Alvin, Cannon, Chester, Harer, Kerry, Liang, Reed, Trainor					
	dropped:	Mayhew					
<i>PC</i>	4 older:	Breitman, Dobbs, J. Hansen, Novack					
	2 middle:	A. Hansen, F. Lovell					
	10 younger:	Barnes, Britton, Horowitz, Sheppard, Stone, Waters, YSA, plus 3 added: P. Camejo, Jenness, Jones					
	middle assigned out of center:	DeBerry, Halstead, Ring, Shaw					

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION
OF THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION
by George Breitman, April 9, 1972

Comrade Dobbs' memorandum of November 16, 1971, is a document that ought to engage the attention of the whole leadership at the coming plenum. What follows is written from the standpoint of one who agrees with the major purpose of his memorandum and, I think, most of his specific or implied proposals, but who views the problems he discusses from a slightly different angle.

The question is how to achieve the best balance of continuity and change in the leadership. In the early years of our movement it was not a pressing problem, and in part took care of itself; splits and defections automatically provided channels of change and renewal. In the second phase (counting either from the start of the cold war in the late 1940s or the Cochran split of 1953) recruitment shrank to a dribble, we were thrown completely onto the defensive, and we had to fight merely to survive; under such conditions the emphasis inevitably is placed on continuity: even its negative aspects then have their positive aspects. So the problem in its present form has been posed for us only since the start of the third phase, around ten years ago, when the objective situation began to change and we started recruiting significant numbers of serious young members. Simultaneously the older comrades began to reach the point where it was plain to them that they could not do what they had formerly been able to.

How has the transitional process worked during this last decade? Speaking as one who was not present in the national center during most of that time, I would say it has worked well. Not perfectly, but well. Not as fast as the comrades who initiated and guided the process wished, but not so slowly that the transition was seriously impeded. As a result we have reached a position of strength from which we can now advance much more rapidly and surely. I think it was this conviction that prompted Comrade Dobbs to say, "Little progress was made at the last party convention in carrying forward the necessary transitions in leadership."

How little the progress was is summarized in the memorandum: Of 28 regular NC members, 27 ran again and were re-elected; since the 28th was elected an advisory member, it can be assumed he too would have been re-elected as a regular if he had not declined. Of the 22 alternates, 17 were renominated and re-elected; one was elected to the regular list; four were dropped; and five were newly elected as alternates. Out of a combined total of 50 regulars and alternates, there are five new faces, a change of 10 percent. This is smaller than the real change that took place in the leadership between the 1969 and 1971 conventions. So far as the NC is concerned, we are lagging behind in the transition.

The situation is even worse if we examine the breakdown of the NC regulars by age as provided in the memorandum: only 9 of the 28 are younger, as compared to 19 in the middle and older age ranges. The age division among the alternates is healthier: 14 younger as against 8 middle or older. But at the recent rate of change in the regular list it would take many years, perhaps

decades, before a similarly healthy ratio is achieved in the regular list.

What can we do to hasten the process? Comrade Dobbs' memorandum points to at least two steps: One is to make the leadership as a whole, and subsequently the party as a whole, more aware of the problem, more conscious about the need to grapple with it. A second seems to be a suggestion that more of the comrades (mainly the older ones, but also some of the middle ones) should consider not running for re-election.

I would like to offer a third: That we try between now and the next convention to alter somewhat the collective party understanding that influences the criteria used by nominating commissions in making their recommendations.

Section II of the memorandum correctly reminds us that continuity of the leadership must not signify or be equated with "automatic self-perpetuation of leadership." It is greatly to our credit that we have avoided self-perpetuation of leadership. But we have not avoided a too slowly changing leadership. The way things are now there is too much continuity and not enough change.

Why is this? Nominating commissions are too conservative, in my opinion. They seem to begin by asking, "Is there any reason why Comrade A should not be renominated?" rather than "Is there any reason why this comrade should be renominated?" If Comrade A, a fine comrade for many years no doubt, has not done anything disgraceful, the tendency is to renominate. This tendency holds even if Comrade A hasn't done anything particularly noteworthy since the last convention either. Get elected to the committee once or twice, and thereafter, unless you do something scandalous or become completely inactive, you've got a better than even chance of continuing to be re-elected for a long time.

I don't blame the members of any particular nominating commission for this tendency: they merely continue what has virtually reached the status of an unwritten tradition. (The 1971 commission was, if anything, less "traditional" than usual; while I disagreed with some of their recommendations, I feel that they were less conservative than many of their predecessors: It has been some time since four members were dropped at one time.) This hasn't mattered too much in the past, but now it matters very much because it has become an impediment to progress.

Recently I ran across two different places where Trotsky referred to Kamenev as a permanent member of the Bolshevik central committee. "Permanent" was puzzling—was it a mistranslation for "regular"? No, it wasn't. Of course there was no such thing as "permanent membership" on the CC. Applying the rule that should guide all translators—first make sure of what the author wrote, then ask what the author meant—I came to the conclusion that what Trotsky meant was that Kamenev was one of the leaders who were always re-elected to the Bolshevik CC. I haven't had the time to do the research, but I think that in Lenin's time, both before and after 1917,

a number of the leaders fell into that category, while another and perhaps larger number were what could be called occasional members, that is, were elected once or twice, then dropped for a time, later re-elected, etc. If this is correct, then continuity in the Bolshevik leadership was maintained not through 90 percent re-elections (as at our 1971 convention) but through the re-election of the central cadre of the leadership, which might turn out to be 50 percent or less.

That is the kind of situation I would like to see in our party—not an end to continuity of leadership, but a re-examination and re-definition of what continuity is and requires. A situation where it would not be unusual for people to go off the committee, or to be transferred from regular to alternate, not because they had done something bad but because other comrades of equal caliber had displayed the capacity to serve as committee members and should have equal opportunity to do so; and where therefore there would be no stigma attached to one's not being renominated time after time.

* * *

While I am at it, I would like to submit two other proposals which are not directly connected with the preceding problem but have some relation to it.

The party constitution provides that national conventions be held at least every two years. I don't propose that we change the constitution but that we consider holding conventions more frequently, say once a year.

I think this is warranted politically. The tempo of events has speeded up considerably in the last decade; the number of new problems we face and will be facing is increasing. Conventions strengthen the party, even though they put a heavier than usual burden on the national office. This kind of party strengthening will be exceptionally valuable and welcome in the next few years when it seems likely that our struggle for hegemony will come to a head.

As it is, we seem to be moving toward a national gathering every year, attended by the great majority of the membership: a convention in 1969, a national educational and activists conference in 1970, a convention in 1971, another educational-activist conference this year. That is, gathering the membership together in one place once a year does not seem to be a problem any more.

Things have changed considerably since we first wrote the every-two-years convention provision into the constitution. No delegates traveled by air at that time, now it is commonplace. Recently I heard a PC member remarking with some awe in his voice about delegates to a convention in India who had had to travel 3 1/2 or 4 days by rail; he was too young to remember that that was quite common for West Coast delegates attending conventions in the early years of our movement.

There are two possible objections to this proposal that I can think of offhand: (1) that a yearly convention and yearly preconvention discussion period might interfere with our external activity, reducing its quantity, etc., and (2) that it might place an unnecessary burden on the comrades in the national office who have to organize the convention, prepare resolutions, etc.

With regard to the first possibility, I tend to minimize it because I think that preconvention discussions heighten

the morale of the membership and therefore make them more rather than less responsive to their responsibilities in external work. At any rate, I would be willing to take the risk that I am wrong here and let experience tell us the answer. (Meanwhile we might check with the YSA and find out what their experience has been with annual conventions and what they do to deal with this question.)

With regard to the second possibility, I would like to suggest that the burden on the national center could be reduced if we adopted some slightly different attitudes toward national conventions. First of all, it is not necessary that we have resolutions on everything under the sun at every convention. Second, it is not necessary that conventions be five days long, or longer. A perfectly adequate convention agenda could consist of two or three main points—an international, a political and an organizational report, for example—with more time allowed for each point than we have been able to allow with 8- or 9-point agendas. If we don't have something new to say on a question, let's not have a point on it; cover it in the political report. Nor do we need a resolution every time we have a point on a subject; sometimes a report is adequate. If we combine a convention with educational sessions, as we did in 1971, we can cover some things more informally in the educational sessions. And if somehow, as a result of this proposed compression, we omit something important, we can always take it up next time, which will be only one year away, not two.

I would suggest this kind of "loosening up" toward national conventions even if the proposal to change their frequency is rejected. And I would like to suggest that we begin to experiment with holding parts of the preconvention discussion in our public press, as we used to do in the early years of our movement; I think that doing this would make the party more attractive to our sympathizers and contacts, and enhance recruitment.

Last year I suggested to comrades in the national office that we consider holding another convention this year, but nothing came of it. Now it is too late, of course. I bring it up now in the hope that we can put it into effect in 1974.

* * *

My final proposal concerns the public spokesmen and women of the party. We have always correctly avoided the kind of thing that happened with the Socialist Party in the time of Norman Thomas, when a single individual came to represent the party more than the party did. But I think we probably bent the stick back too far. Most Americans tend to think of political tendencies in terms of their leaders; we can deplore this, but I don't think we can deny it. The SWP appears a little too anonymous to the public, I am afraid. Of course we have our candidates to speak for us, and the problem I refer to would be much worse if we did not participate in electoral contests regularly. But our candidates are always changing, and anyhow there still are periods when no important election is taking place. I think we can deal with this problem by taking steps that are quite devoid of artificiality or phoniness. We should designate three or four of our active leaders to be the public spokesmen and women of the party—who call press conferences when the party has something to announce, who appear at

public hearings, and who sign articles in our press not only with their names but also with their titles. The national secretary should be one of these. The national chairmanship should be utilized for the same purpose (that is, changed from an honorary to an active operational post; if this is done, Comrade Cannon could

be designated honorary chairman). We could have a vice-chairman/woman, or even two. The aim would be to "personalize" the party a little more for the benefit of contacts and readers of our press, to whom now it may seem somewhat impersonal and remote.

ELECTION OF NATIONAL OFFICERS

May 14, 1972

Dobbs:

Comrades, perhaps it would be useful to begin by explaining the thinking behind the arrangement of the last three points on the plenum agenda, the election of national officers, National Committee membership, and the Political Committee. Taken together, these three points embrace the steps we think it is realistic to take at this plenum to carry forward the transition in leadership. They are arranged in this sequence because we felt that it would provide a logical way for the plenum to proceed from one action to the next in making these decisions.

Under the present point, election of national officers, there are two points. First the one upon which I will submit the recommendation, that is the election of the incoming national secretary. After this, it would follow logically, the incoming national secretary should present to the plenum the proposals for the designation of comrades to any other national posts that are decided upon at this time.

After the questions of the central executive post in the party and the other national posts are decided, we come to a question touching on the process of leadership transition as it relates in another form to the role of some of the older central leaders. Under the second point, National Committee membership, Comrade Novack and myself are prepared to ask for a change in National Committee status from regular to advisory membership. That should be decided ahead of the Political Committee point because what the plenum decides there has a bearing on how to proceed with the election of the Political Committee.

One aspect of the Political Committee elections will be the normal process of selecting as regular Political Committee members comrades who are regular members of the National Committee. The other aspect has to do with regularizing the formal relationship in a consultative capacity with the Political Committee of older central leading comrades two of whom, George Novack and myself, are asking for advisory National Committee membership status at this plenum and Comrade Tom Kerry who has had that status since 1969. It is for reasons of this logical sequence in making these decisions that we have prepared the agenda points in the form that they appear.

Coming now to the matter upon which I am reporting and the recommendation I am to make, Comrade Novack reminded me just before the session convened of

something I hadn't thought of. In a manner of speaking, this is my third resignation. In 1932 I resigned from a promising supervisory position in Western Electric Company because I couldn't stomach what they were trying to make out of me as a supervisory pawn of a heartless corporation. That led me into the trade-union movement, due to a given sequence of events. In 1939 I resigned from the general organization staff of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters because the party believed, and I concurred, that I could better serve our movement by leaving the Teamsters and coming to work for the party. And now I propose to withdraw from my present executive post in the party in order to facilitate the transition of leadership which is so important to us in these changing times.

You have been aware for some time of my intention in this regard. It was called to your attention at the post-convention plenum in Oberlin last summer. That was done in the course of making the recommendations I presented there concerning the election of national officers at that time. Perhaps it would be helpful to remind you in passing who are presently the three national officers of the party. Comrade Cannon is national chairman, Comrade Barnes is national organization secretary and I am presently national secretary.

I call to your attention that this was recommended to the post-convention plenum as simply an interim step pending our deliberations at this plenum, because we didn't want to make any push-em-up decision about a change in national officers in the immediate aftermath of the convention. We wanted a little time to think about it, to make some recommendations to the members of the National Committee in advance of this plenum, and then come together in the plenum in a better position to make the necessary series of decisions.

In keeping with that understanding, I submitted a memorandum on the leadership question last November. I should call to your attention that the memorandum was distributed to the National Committee members in their entirety by a decision of the Political Committee but at my suggestion and with the concurrence of the other comrades in the Political Committee, the Political Committee did not at that time discuss the memorandum or take a position on it. It was felt by all of us that it was better to go ahead and let all the members of the National Committee, including the Political Committee, utilize my mem-

orandum to trigger their thinking about the general problems of the transition of leadership and give everybody time to familiarize themselves with some of the specific problems as we see them at this stage and some of the specific steps we think are necessary to carry forward in the transition.

I don't think it is necessary for me to attempt here to summarize the essential content of that memorandum because you have all had a chance to study it carefully for some months now and reflect on it. I want to focus simply on what I consider one of the central aspects of the situation at this stage with regard to the action we propose to take.

The proposed change in national secretary is in no respect a shotgun proposition. For quite a few years now the older central party leaders have been striving to prepare the way for changes in the central executive leadership. We began by trying to find a way to make room for younger leading comrades to play more and more of a central leadership role, to provide them opportunities to expand their services to the party in those roles and to give the cadres of the party as a whole, a chance in the work-a-day life of the party to test the relative leadership merits of the younger comrades coming forward and showing leadership promise. We felt that across a period of time within reasonable bounds this question would begin to sort itself out and logical candidates for national executive posts in the party would emerge from among the younger comrades. I believe that has been the case.

More specifically, with regard to this point on the agenda, we envisaged utilization of the post of organization secretary as one with a dual character, on the one side serving in part as a segment of the division of labor in carrying out the daily party work and at the same time as a sort of preparatory school for learning and demonstrating the capacity to function as what has traditionally been the central executive officer in our party, national secretary.

In May 1969 Jack Barnes was elected by the plenum as organization secretary, and, although it wasn't formally stated there, I think it was no secret to anybody that we already had this factor in mind. He was showing some outstanding promise in leadership capacity and we wanted to put him through a course of basic training in functioning as the party's central executive officer and let the party watch him and see how it stacked up. It is my opinion that he has come through the test well, and I personally feel that the party need have no hesitations about proceeding now to designate him as its national secretary. And in concluding I will make that formal proposal to you.

Before doing that, I want to comment on some aspects of the question of other national posts. This will be dealt with specifically in the next report under this point but I want to communicate to you a little of the background information and some of my own thinking on the matter while I have the floor.

It will be proposed later under this agenda point that Comrade Cannon be designated National Chairman Emeritus. There are two essential reasons for this proposal. He is presently national chairman, and in the changing situation there is a growing need to have flexibility to utilize that post in the distribution of the divi-

sion of labor among the younger leaders who are carrying more and more of the responsibility for the active leadership of the party. And for that reason it is best that Comrade Cannon no longer hold this post.

At the same time it is important that we designate Comrade Cannon to a special executive post in keeping with this proposal, that of National Chairman Emeritus, because Comrade Cannon personifies the distilled essence of our public demonstration of continuity of leadership in this party, and that is a very important factor. It is well to keep in mind that Comrade Cannon is not only the founding central leader of the party, Comrade Cannon is also one of the founding leaders of the Fourth International. One of the world movement's outstanding leaders, who as head of the Socialist Workers Party worked in the closest and most intimate collaboration with Comrade Leon Trotsky from 1928 up to the time of Trotsky's assassination in 1940, Jim Cannon helped in all the preparatory stages and in the actual founding of the Fourth International in 1938 and has carried a very substantial load in connection with the attempts to go forward, as the Old Man charged us, in the building of the Fourth International since Trotsky's death.

All these things are personified in Comrade Cannon and therefore he stands as a unique individual, personally embodying what is basic to the continuity of leadership in the cadres of our party. For that reason we believe it fitting and proper, advisable and necessary that he be designated national chairman emeritus.

Now I should note at the same time that this means establishing a new category. We have never before used the category of emeritus in designating comrades to any post on any basis in our party. It is a special designation to serve a special occasion. Just as Comrade Cannon in his role as a founding leader of the world Trotskyist movement is a unique individual in the movement, the utilization of the post of emeritus in his case should be interpreted as a unique utilization and not the setting of a precedent nor the occasion to begin thinking about who else we can make into an emeritus in the coming times. It's not a matter of handing out posts to anybody because it's nice to have a post.

At all times and in all circumstances, the designation of any individual comrade to a post by the party must serve the interests and needs of the party and no other interests. So, this step of creating a new category with regard to designation of posts should not at all be interpreted as a precedent. Personally, as matters stand at this time so far as I can see, I can't think of any reason why we would want to do this with respect to anyone else.

This proposal has been discussed with Comrade Cannon by the younger central leaders. Both Comrade Barnes and Comrade Sheppard have talked with him about it and he has stated to them that he concurs fully with this proposal. He thinks that it is the correct thing to do at this point and feels that we are right in stressing that by virtue of his unique role as a founding leader that there is a significance for the party in having a formal National Chairman Emeritus post.

As a matter of fact, Comrade Cannon was the first to raise this idea about ten years ago. Perhaps George Novack and Evelyn Reed will remember in late December of 1962 I was visiting Los Angeles. The three of us rode out into the desert to spend a couple of days with Rose

Karsner and Jim Cannon, who were there, and we talked about this problem. It was there also that we first began to chew on the concept of utilizing the post of organization secretary as a post for preliminary training with respect to the development of a comrade to the point where the comrade could be designated national secretary and replace me.

We also talked about the need to have more flexibility with regard to the utilization of national posts. When I replaced Comrade Cannon as national secretary, in 1953, he was then designated national chairman. We were in different times, different circumstances, and it was a logical thing to do at that point. Now we have to think about the new stage the party has reached, in terms of the need for greater flexibility with respect to these posts, and it was in that general vein that Comrade Cannon suggested even then that we consider in due course the question of whether or not he should be given an emeritus status.

In talking with Comrade Barry Sheppard, just within the last month, Jim suggested that we consider whether or not it would be advisable for me to be designated national chairman in the course of replacing me in the position of national secretary. He indicated that what he had in mind was the question of giving an additional demonstration of the continuity of leadership. I have thought that matter over very carefully and it is my firm opinion that it is neither necessary nor advisable. I would like to state the reasons why.

With respect to the factor of demonstrating continuity in the leadership I don't think the criteria apply in the sense they did when I replaced Comrade Cannon as national secretary. Then his designation as national chairman was simply the form of doing precisely what we propose to do now by designating Comrade Cannon National Chairman Emeritus, that is, an official post for the founding leader of the party in order to demonstrate continuity. I don't believe that applies in my case. I think that when the younger central leaders who are now beginning to take over the active leadership responsibility from those of us among the older central leaders who are moving now into a consultative leadership position, concur in designating Comrade Cannon to an emeritus post, that is definitive in making this demonstration of the continuity of the leadership of the party. I think anything else is superfluous, not necessary—but that's not all.

I can see what I believe could be a potential disadvantage in designating me national chairman upon my withdrawal from the post of national secretary. It could give the implication that we are developing a tradition in which, if you once get elected national secretary, you're a cinch to have one or another post from then on. The implication would be, if you get elected national secretary, then the next thing is you're national chairman, and the next thing is you're emeritus. That wouldn't do the party any good. It would make a problem for us. So on both these counts, with regards to the matter of continuity, I consider it inadvisable and unnecessary.

From another point of view, I don't see any reason why I have to have a formal national post in the party in order to do what I may be able to do in playing a consultative leadership role. I have become less and less an active central leader in the party. As a matter of fact,

the present reality is that Jack is functioning as the active national secretary, and I am functioning, although still formally national secretary, as a consultative central leader. A post is not necessary for that.

Thinking further about it, something occurred to me that I can perhaps pose by paraphrasing a remark of Frank Lovell's in his trade-union report the other night: "Should you make me national chairman just for the hell of it?" Or to put it a little more precisely, should you do this on the grounds that it might help a little and in any case wouldn't do any harm?

The answer is no.

It would get in the way of party needs. We are in a new and what is becoming an increasingly complex stage of party building. That is abundantly illustrated by our deliberations across the last four days here at this plenum. The active central leaders of the party need all the flexibility they can possibly have to utilize the various active national posts as organizational tools in carrying out the work. And national executive posts should always be looked upon in that respect. They are simply an organizational tool, like all other mechanisms that we employ in carrying on the party work. And the younger central leaders who are now carrying the main burden of the active leadership responsibility in the party need all the latitude, all the leeway they can have to utilize the various national posts in order to carry forward in the best possible manner our party building work in the next period.

On the more precise aspects, and specific proposals with regard to these posts, the recommendations will be made by the incoming national secretary after you have made the decision as to who is going to fill the post. So with that I come to the central reason for my taking the floor at this time.

I might say first, I have consulted the candidate that I in mind. He has informed me that if nominated, he will run. If elected, he will serve. Therefore I now nominate Comrade Jack Barnes as national secretary of the party.

Barnes:

Comrades, as you know from the Political Committee minutes and Farrell's remarks, I would like to place before you the nomination of Comrade Cannon as National Chairman Emeritus of the party and Comrade Barry Sheppard as national organization secretary of the party.

My reasons for nominating Comrade Cannon have been fundamentally given by Farrell. If I may just add one point for the comrades of the leadership of the party who became leaders in the recent period and thus could not work directly with Jim as a fellow day-to-day leader but knew him to one degree or another as a comrade and knew him through his books and his works. What we have discovered in shouldering our responsibilities in international work makes the historical importance of Jim all the more clear. If I could repeat one of the ideas we raised the first day of the plenum I think Jim symbolizes as a revolutionary politician operating on the basis of fundamental Marxist principles, consciously basing himself on the continuity of the world communist movement, exactly those qualities which translated into Leninist organization are most needed, most useful, and

a crucial contribution to the new generation of leaders in the international movement. The growing interest in, and I hope the growing translations of and growing knowledge of what Jim did, said, and stood for, will be one of our major contributions to the world movement in the coming period.

As Farrell said we have discussed each stage of the transition of leadership with Jim. I discussed this question with Jim prior to taking my current assignment and then Barry discussed this with Jim just before the plenum, and he agrees with this nomination.

The nomination of Barry Sheppard as organization secretary is also no surprise to the comrades. To a large degree, Barry has acted as organization secretary since he returned from Europe to the center in 1970 and began taking part in the central day-to-day executive leadership of the party. As I assumed more and more of the responsibilities of acting national secretary, in collaboration with Farrell, over this period, Barry has done the same as organization secretary. I would say that from the period just prior to our last convention, Barry has been in practice the organization secretary of the party.

I am sure most of the comrades know the fundamental facts about Barry. He joined the movement at the end of the 1950s, served as national chairman of the YSA, edited *The Militant*, represented the party in Europe in our fraternal participation in the world movement, and served on the Political Committee this entire period. Prior to the convention, Barry has had more time first to work with the comrades responsible for the development of the na-

tional departments and the expansion of the party at the center, and recently has begun to have the time, as we've tooled up the Administrative Committee, to begin getting out to talk to and know the National Committee and organizers in the field and the problems of leading the party from that angle.

I don't propose making a nomination for national chairman or woman or men or women or vice-chairman or women of the party. I completely agree with Farrell's wish not to be nominated as national chairman. Not only for the reasons he outlined, but also because I am personally confident that it means no change in his collaboration with the central leaders of the party or the character of that collaboration.

I also have another reason. One of the things we have to collectively think out is the question of how in this new period with our needs we want to use the post of chairman or chairwoman. We have had a contribution from George Breitman that all the comrades on the committee have received giving some ideas and suggestions about how we might best utilize this post in the development of the party. We'd like to share among ourselves the thinking of the other national leaders and think this out further and then as we do so, propose whatever steps are necessary. For that reason, I place no nomination for that post before you.

The two formal nominations are one, to nominate Comrade Cannon as National Chairman Emeritus of the party, and two, to nominate Comrade Sheppard national organization secretary.

EXCERPTS FROM MAY 1972 NATIONAL COMMITTEE PLENUM

7. ELECTION OF NATIONAL OFFICERS

Dobbs nominated Barnes National Secretary

No further nominations.

Motion: To elect Barnes National Secretary

Regular: *for*, unanimous
Consultative: *for*, unanimous
Carried.

Barnes nominated Cannon National Chairman Emeritus, and Sheppard National Organization Secretary.

No further nominations.

Motion: To elect Cannon National Chairman Emeritus.

Regular: *for*, unanimous
Consultative: *for*, unanimous
Carried.

Motion: To elect Sheppard National Organization Secretary.

Regular: *for*, unanimous
Consultative: *for*, unanimous
Carried.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Dobbs:

Comrades, between now and the convention it will be necessary for the National Committee and for the party as a whole to think very carefully about the steps to be taken at the next convention to facilitate the transitions in leadership. What we are doing at this plenum sets in motion a process I believe will put us in a much more favorable position than we were in at the last convention in this regard. As I pointed out in my memorandum last November on the leadership question, the nominating commission at the last convention was confronted with a quite difficult problem, the desire on the one hand to make room for more promising younger comrades on the National Committee and the lack of room for such change on the committee. Between now and the convention we have to give that very careful thought and be prepared to act to facilitate this process in a very conscious way.

I want to make clear that in proposing the specific actions by George Novack and myself that are definitely before you on this point today, this does not imply introducing a sense of urgency in this matter, but rather that as of this moment these are two steps that can and we think should be taken because it will suffice to serve an immediate need with regard to the composition of the Political Committee. It is in that sense that we introduce this, and not in the sense that pressure is being put on anybody to make a shotgun decision or to try to create any kind of stampede at this plenum of voluntary actions on the part of comrades with respect to changes in committee status.

I should point out secondly, as I did in the memorandum, that the National Committee plenum has full authority to act on this question. That was established when we created the advisory membership category at the 1962 plenum, a provision that was then ratified by the next national convention of the party in 1963. The plenum cannot add anyone to the National Committee, but it can authorize a change in the status of a member of the committee within the committee itself from regular to advisory membership. And as was the case with the original decision, any action taken today by the plenum will of course remain subject to verification by the next convention of the party, but the action taken is effective immediately.

On that basis, speaking now for myself, I request that my status on the National Committee be changed from regular to advisory membership. I make the request on this basis: (1) I am no longer playing that kind of an active leadership role that makes it necessary or advisable for me to be a regular member of the committee; (2) I ask for advisory status because I will be playing a consultative role and in that sense will remain an integral part of the central leadership of the party.

I might say in passing that Jack will elaborate on this matter under the next point on the agenda, the Political Committee. Proposals he will make concerning consultative membership on the Political Committee are intended to facilitate this process of having a formal basis to act in a consultative role in the central leadership, doing

so in a logical and consistent way that has clear definition and therefore can be carried out in the best and most efficient manner.

So with that brief explanation, I formally request that the plenum honor my wish to be changed from regular to advisory membership on the National Committee subject to verification by the next convention of the party.

Novack:

I also am resigning from regular membership on the National Committee primarily for the reasons given in Farrell's memorandum and his remarks here although I have the additional reason that I want to shift my work more into the literary and theoretical sphere. I have taken this decision at this time also for a more personal, somewhat sentimental reason.

When Farrell came to the center in the spring of 1940, to take the post of organization secretary, similar to that now occupied by Barry, he had a tough job on his hands. He had to organize and administer a party that was split and losing forty percent of its effective forces and 90 percent of its youth, and do it in a country heading toward war and the persecution of the revolutionary vanguard. A comrade in that situation urgently needs help he can rely upon among his coworkers. Perhaps some of you will remember a cartoon strip by Webster called "When a Fellow Needs a Friend." That was Farrell's situation.

In his quest for such assistance, Farrell invited me one sunny afternoon to take a ride on the top of an open-air Fifth Avenue bus. He explained his problem and solicited my cooperation. I remember very vividly one point he made. "I belong to the proletarian section of the party," he said. "You are one of the few qualified intellectuals left after the faction fight. The rest have gone with the Burnham-Shachtman crowd of deserters. What I propose is a teaming up of these two essential components of our movement to keep it going through the hard days ahead and rebuild its strength. What do you say?" What could I answer but yes. And on that we clasped hands and sealed a compact that has defied the laws of probability, the exception proving the rule, and endured over many political and personal vicissitudes for thirty-two years. That's a pretty good record in our line of endeavor.

There's not much symmetry in the extremely untidy course of the revolutionary struggle as some of you have already found out. So to synchronize my withdrawal from the National Committee with Farrell's gives me special satisfaction. We have served together on it for the past third of a century, a period that started, I note, before three-quarters of the current party membership was born. This action will round out that prolonged span of our collaboration as part of the national leadership team, and I stress the word team. It's been a relationship marked by friendship, trust and mutual respect, based upon a common commitment to building the kind of party that can promote and realize the goals of socialism on American soil.

I am also requesting the National Committee to accord me advisory status. I do so because the comrades at the

center have said that it would be useful if along with Tom and Farrell, I could be available in a consultative capacity at Political Committee meetings. At the same time, I must tell you that I assume advisory status with a certain reluctance, for the following reasons. The advisory status was instituted in 1962 in order to expedite the process of making room in the national leadership for younger comrades who were responsible for directing party activities in diverse areas. It has helped accelerate the process of leadership renewal without a doubt. However, it was not envisaged as a standard fixture of our organizational set-up nor as an ever-lasting institution. It was a temporary expedient which we hoped could be dispensed with over time. That was ten years ago. As the French say, "Nothing is so permanent as the provisional."

Under the given circumstances, it doesn't seem advisable to do away altogether with this status. But the sooner that this anomaly withers away, the better in the long run. And I stand ready to participate in its abolition when that's judged desirable.

Nationally and internationally, the tasks, the problems, the accomplishments of the next elected and selected execu-

tive leaders will be of far greater magnitude than those of their predecessors. What has been done to date may be likened to a pilot operation. We've gone through preliminary experimental steps, tested our program, worked out many of our methods and procedures of organization. I think they're pretty well embedded in the habits and consciousness of our members. Now we are beginning in earnest to tool up for large-scale production in the class struggle.

Under capitalist conditions, the multinational American working class has outproduced other countries in industry and agriculture. We expect that with Marxist guidance they are going to be equally productive in the field of anticapitalist action, and that's what we are preparing for. For us, the crux of the matter is this: will the revolutionary vanguard be equal to its problems and its prospects. I think the cadres we've welded together and are training will be able to handle that titanic job. As the succession of leadership moves forward, we firmly believe, I speak here, I presume, for a number of the older comrades, to conclude on this Sunday with a Biblical turn of phrase, that "Our faith will be justified by your works."

EXCERPTS FROM MAY 1972 NATIONAL COMMITTEE PLENUM

8. NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Dobbs requested that his status be changed from regular member of the National Committee to that of advisory member.

Novack requested that his status be changed from regular member of the National Committee to that of advisory member.

Motion: To approve the change of status from regular membership on the National Committee to advisory membership on the National Committee for *Dobbs* and *Novack* pending the ratification of the next national convention.

Regular: *for*, unanimous
Consultative: *for*, unanimous
Carried.

ELECTION OF POLITICAL COMMITTEE

May 14, 1972

Barnes:

First I should say that the action we have just taken granting Farrell and George advisory status means the first and second alternate members of the National Committee now assume regular membership in the committee. They are Comrade Charlie Bolduc of Detroit and Comrade Derrick Morrison of New York. When the national committee approves a change in status from regular membership to advisory membership, the alternate members as they are ranked move up to fill the vacancies as regular members and the openings in the alternate list remain open until the next convention. So everything else remains the same on the alternate list, and Comrades Bolduc and Morrison are now regular members of the National Committee.

I would like to put three motions before you for consideration at the plenum and then go back over them and motivate them briefly.

The first motion is to elect a Political Committee of sixteen members and to nominate these sixteen comrades: Barnes, Breitman, Britton, Camejo, A. Hansen, J. Hansen, Horowitz, Jenness, Jones, Lovell, Morrison, Shaw, Sheppard, Stone, Waters, and a representative to be designated by the youth NEC.

The second motion: to establish the category of consultative membership on the Political Committee, with voice and consultative vote.

Third: to designate Dobbs, Kerry and Novack as consultative members of the Political Committee.

The proposal for the Political Committee before you is the same Political Committee that we elected at the convention, with two changes, of course. One, at that time, Farrell and George were regular members of the National Committee, and they were nominated and elected as regular members of the Political Committee. The changes which I have just proposed will, if accepted, change their status. To replace them as regular members of the Political Committee, there are two proposed additions, which keep the number at sixteen. The first one is Ed Shaw, and the second is Derrick Morrison.

Ed has agreed to come back to the center and to resume his responsibilities as part of the central executive leadership of the party. I don't have to motivate Ed's nomination to the Political Committee to you. Ed's agreement to do this is not only very important in and of itself but it is also important because Ed is a member of the relatively thin generation of leaders of the party who have been so important, and whose full collaboration remains key, to continuing the transitions in the entire leadership team we have to make. I don't have to repeat Ed's qualifications. So with this proposal, Ed would be added to the committee.

The second proposed addition is Derrick. Derrick is, of course, one of the national leaders of the YSA from an earlier period, has been an alternate member of the national committee for several years now and at the last convention was placed on the national committee as second alternate, showing the confidence that convention had in

his leadership capacities. In the past period, while he has, of course, taken several responsibilities organizationally in our various interventions in the Black struggle, Derrick's primary responsibility has been as a member of the staff of the paper. For these reasons, I feel Derrick is qualified and would add something to the Political Committee.

There is, of course, an additional reason, and an important one. It would mean that one of the Black members of the National Committee, now a regular member, would be a member of the Political Committee, would contribute to the collective decision-making, would add his thoughts to the deliberations of the Political Committee and also go through the process of education that's part of the experience on the Political Committee.

Both Ed and Derrick have agreed to serve on the committee.

The category of consultative membership on the Political Committee doesn't have to be motivated again, Farrell, in order to explain the steps he wanted to take motivated it. It really flows from our experience with Tom Kerry. In 1969 when Tom proposed taking advisory status, we were all in favor of that. It was part of the transition in leadership which was in harmony with Tom's leaving the day-to-day executive responsibilities he carried so long as part of the central leadership and moving over to other responsibilities. But it also involved a problem. The problem was that it was useful and necessary for the maximum functioning of the Political Committee to have Tom's participation, political ideas, argumentation, contributions. We resolved this informally by informing the National Committee at the time that we intended to invite Tom to Political Committee meetings. His opinion on important questions or divided questions was recorded as a consultative vote in the Political Committee minutes. Whenever we had discussions, transcripts of which were made available for the information of the National Committee members, Tom's contributions were included. What the motion on consultative PC membership does is formalize this in a category.

It's, of course, a very limited category, very narrow in its potential composition. It includes those central leaders of the party who have been central executive leaders for a couple of decades on the Political Committee. But even though it's a very narrow category, we still thought, along the lines of Farrell's memorandum, that it would be better to formalize it in this way, rather than have it remain informal. The experience with Tom has convinced us that we were correct in moving in this direction. First, it was a help because Tom's decision to become an advisory member of the national committee opened up the possibility of making further transitions and at the same time by having this relationship with the Political Committee we lost none of Tom's contributions, in thinking out the direction of the party and its line.

The motion is to establish the category of consultative membership on the Political Committee with voice and consultative vote and to designate the three comrades now available who would meet the criteria I outlined:

Comrade Dobbs, Comrade Kerry, Comrade Novack, as consultative members of the Political Committee. This, of course, is a National Committee responsibility, not a Political Committee responsibility. This is not a post

that can be filled by cooption. It is up to the National Committee to decide whether or not to alter the form of the Political Committee by adding this category.

EXCERPTS FROM MAY 1972
NATIONAL COMMITTEE PLENUM

9. ELECTION OF POLITICAL COMMITTEE

Barnes reported that *Bolduc* and *Morrison*, elected first and second alternate members of the National Committee by the last convention, are now regular members of the National Committee.

Motion: To elect a Political Committee of 16 members.

Regular: *for*, unanimous
Consultative: *for*, unanimous
Carried.

Barnes nominated: *Barnes*, *Breitman*, *Britton*, *P. Camejo*, *A. Hansen*, *J. Hansen*, *Horowitz*, *Jeness*, *Jones*, *Lovell*, *Morrison*, *Shaw*, *Sheppard*, *Stone*, *Waters* and a representative to be designated by the youth NEC.

No further nominations.

Motion: To elect the 16 nominees.

Regular: *for*, unanimous
Consultative: *for*, unanimous
Carried.

Motion: To establish a category of consultative membership on the Political Committee with voice and consultative vote.

Regular: *for*, unanimous
Consultative: *for*, unanimous
Carried.

Motion: To designate *Dobbs*, *Kerry* and *Novack* as consultative members of the Political Committee.

Regular: *for*, unanimous
Consultative: *for*, unanimous
Carried.

BY JAMES P. CANNON

COMMENTS ON THE SELECTION OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE

[Editor's note: Written from Sandstone Prison in 1944 and adopted as the Nominating Commission procedure at the 1944 convention and all subsequent ones.]

In our opinion the most important reason for stretching the convention out for another day is to give adequate time for a free and well deliberated selection by the delegates of the new National Committee. This is one of the strongest guarantees of the democracy of the party. Our party has always been more democratic, ten times more democratic in this respect than any other party. But there is room for improvement, and we should consciously seek out the necessary methods. We never went in for any of the rigging, wangling, vote-trading and leadership pressure devices by which, in all other parties, the convention delegates are usually defrauded of a large part of their democratic freedom of choice. If one has a self-sufficient revolutionary party in mind, all such methods are self-defeating. A revolutionary party needs a leadership that really represents the party, that is really one with the party. Without this democratic corrective, freely brought into play at every convention, centralization and discipline inevitably become caricatures and forms of abuse which injure the organization every time they are exercised. A revolutionary leadership must feel free at all times to act boldly and confidently in the name of the party. For that, it needs to be sure that there is no flaw in its mandate.

No rules exist to guide us in the technical execution of this difficult and delicate task to the best advantage of the party. The democratic selection of the primary and secondary leaders is a sufficiently important question -- nobody knows how much damage can be done by bungling it -- but, as far as I know, nobody has ever written anything about it. Nobody has taught us anything. We are obliged to think and experiment for ourselves.

The democratic impulses of the rank and file incline them to react unfavorably to "slates," as they feel, not without reason, that they narrow down, for all practical purposes, the freedom of choice. The social democratic politicians, who are as undemocratic a collection of rascals as one can ever expect to meet, have always exploited this sentiment by announcing their firm, democratic opposition to slates. Of course, there was a little catch to their virtuous slogan of "no slates." They meant no openly-avowed slates which would possibly be open to discussion and amendment. Instead of that, the noble social democrats rig up

secret slates by means of horse-trades and petty bribes to ensure their control. A good 50% of social democratic convention "politics" is always devoted to this kind of business.

From the first days of American communism, which also coincided with the first appearance on the scene of a new type of leaders with a new conception of "politics," we tried to break through the "no slate" fraud and devise a more honest system by which the leaders would take open responsibility for their proposals and give reasons for their preferences in the make-up of the leading committee. It became rather common practice for the leading committees, in national as well as local conventions in the communist movement, to propose a slate of candidates for the new committee to be elected. We carried the practice with us in the independent movement of Trotskyism. (During factional struggles the slate-making arrangements were carried on in the separate caucuses of the factions.) This method was, without doubt, far superior to the "no-slate" tricks of our socialist predecessors, being more honest, and in the essence of the matter, even more democratic.

But this system, also, was not free from negative aspects, and even dangers. I perceived some of them long ago, have thought much about the matter, and from time to time have tried to devise corrective experiments. What impressed me most of all was the quite obvious fact that while the presentation of a slate of candidates by the leadership is the most "efficient" way to get through the business of the election of the N.C. -- usually the last point on the agenda, carried through in a great hurry -- it concentrates too much power in the leadership just at that very point -- the convention -- where the democratic corrective of rank and file control should be asserted most strongly. It is not the election of the central, most prominent and influential leaders themselves. That problem solves itself almost automatically in the interplay of party work and internal strife. The problem arises over the selection of the secondary leaders, the new committee members, the potential leaders of the future. As a rule, this part of the slate, if presented by the most authoritative central leaders, is accepted whether enthusiastically or not, by the convention; many delegates are reluctant to oppose them.

It is senseless, of course, to speak

of a revolutionary combat party without recognizing the necessity of a centralized, full-empowered leadership. But this states only one-half of the problem. Leninist centralism is democratic centralism, a profoundly dialectical concept. The other half of the Leninist formula recognizes no less the necessity of subordinating the leadership, really as well as formally, to the party; keeping it under the control of the party. The party constitution does everything that can be done in a formal sense to provide for the interaction of centralism and democracy. The structure of the party is strictly hierarchical. Higher committees command the lower. Full authority over all is vested in the National Committee. But the N.C., like all other committees, is required to render accounts and surrender its mandate at stated intervals to the party convention to which it is subordinated. This is the formal, constitutional guarantee both for centralization and the ultimate control of the leadership. But it is also necessary to think about the spirit as well as the letter of the party constitution. A far-sighted leadership should concern itself with the elusive, intangible factors which can play such a great role in determining the actual relationship between the N.C. and the ranks.

Some of these factors arise from the composition of the N.C. and the division of functions within it. Nominally, this body consists of 25 members, and they all have equal rights. In addition there are 15 alternates. But the majority come to the center only for meetings of the plenum, which are not held very often. Between plenums the power is delegated to the Political Committee. From this it is quite clear that one section of the National Committee is in a position to exert far more influence on the day-to-day work and interpretation of party policy than the other. Again, some are older, more experienced and more prominent than others, and consequently, wield greater authority in the committee, as well as in the party as a whole. On the other side, the committee members from the districts and the younger members of the committee generally, who are active in local work, are closer to the rank and file than the central leaders of the party are, and represent them more directly and intimately. This gives them a special function in the N.C. of extraordinary importance. Their presence represents a form of continuing rank and file control and supervision over the central leaders. They can fulfill this function, however, only insofar as they are people of independent influence and popularity in their own localities; only insofar as they are freely elected on their own merits, not hand picked.

To be sure, the central leaders cannot be indifferent to the selection of the secondary leadership. In this, as in

everything else, leaders must lead. In a certain sense, the central party leaders "select" their collaborators and eventual successors. The question is, how to go about it? It is often easy for politically experienced leaders to convince themselves that they are better judges of the qualifications and potentialities of certain candidates than the rank and file delegates. And, as a rule, it is not too difficult to force their selections through by means of the "slate." This may appear to be the most "efficient" way. But, in my opinion, there is a better way.

Wisdom lies in "selecting" people who have popularity and influence in their own right, and whose promotion coincides with the wishes of the party members who know them best. That means, to select people who are advancing under their own power.

I came to this conclusion a long time ago, and as far as I have been able to influence the course of things, it has been the party method of selecting the N.C. Extensive and varied experiences, with every imaginable kind of experiment, has convinced me that this method, even at the cost of incidental mistakes, works out best in the long run.

The central leaders of the party, who work from day to day without close contact with the internal life of the branches, need such a constitution of the N.C. if they are to lead the party confidently; lead it with the assurance that they know the moods and sentiments of the ranks and are in step with them. When doubt arises, or when some new important step is under consideration, it is only necessary to consult the out-of-town members of the N.C. by mail, or to call a plenum, in order to get a reliable sounding of the party. Approval of a given course by the plenum is a pretty certain forecast of similar action by the party. Conversely, when the plenum finds it necessary to over-rule the Political Committee -- and this has happened more than once, notably in 1938-39 -- it is a sign that the Political Committee is out of line with the party and requires a change in its composition. The 1938-39 National Committee rebuked the P.C. several times and finally reorganized it, and later tests showed that the full plenum most accurately reflected the sentiment of the party. A serious and conscientious party leadership should deliberately aim at a National Committee so composed as to be, in effect, a microcosm of the party. When the full plenum of such a National Committee meets between conventions, to all intents and purposes the party is there in the room. That is far more useful to responsible political leaders than a roomful of hand-picked supporters without independent influence and authority. Bureaucrats who have special interests of their own to defend against the rank and file need to

surround themselves with dependent henchmen, but revolutionary political leaders need support of an entirely different kind, the support of people who really represent the rank and file of the party.

There is another, and even more important, reason why the rank and file convention delegates should take over the election of the National Committee and be free from undue pressure and influence on the part of the national political leadership in exercising this function. The free selection of the full membership of the National Committee is perhaps the most decisive way to strengthen and reinforce genuine party democracy. It puts the political leaders under the direct supervision and control of a second line of leaders who are in intimate daily contact with the local and district organizations and, in fact, represent them in the plenum. This control does not have to be exercised every day to be effective. The fact that it's there, and can be demonstrated when necessary, is what counts. Strange to relate, the professional democrats have never once in the history of our party bothered their heads about the method of selecting the National Committee from the standpoint of reinforcing party democracy. This, in my opinion, is because they tend to think of democracy almost exclusively in terms of unlimited and unrestricted self-expression, and forget that control of the central leadership, which in day-to-day practice is limited to a very small group, by a larger group standing closer to the rank and file, is the most important mechanism to assure the democratic half of the Leninist formula: democratic centralism.

Throwing the floor open for nominations on the last day of the convention is not the only alternative to a slate presented by the outgoing N.C. That only throws the delegate body into disorganized confusion and facilitates the manipulation of the election by means of secret slates and horse trades, the favorite method of social democratic pseudo-democrats.

There is no infallible formula, but the results of our experiments over a period of many years argue most convincingly in favor of a slate prepared by a nominating commission. Of course, there are nominating commissions and nominating commissions. But the best, that is, the most democratic, is not the nominating commission appointed by the outgoing N.C. nor the one elected at random from the floor of the convention. The most efficient, for the purposes set forth above, is the nominating commission selected by the branch or district delegations on a roughly proportional basis -- each delegation selecting its own representatives -- and then ratified by the convention. The nominating commission, thus conceived, is a body actually representing the rank and

file delegations from the districts. It would be grossly improper for individual central leaders to intrude themselves upon the commission and seek to dominate its proceedings. That would amount to a circumvention of the democratic process aimed at in the proposal. It is the part of wisdom for the central leaders to leave the nominating commission to its own devices, respecting the essence of party democracy as well as the form.

The nominating commission should be selected on the first day of the convention; it should begin its sessions at once, and meet at least once a day thereafter to consider the various nominations, until a slate is decided upon for presentation to the convention when the election of the N.C. comes up on the agenda. In my opinion, the first step of the commission at the 1944 convention should be to discard formally the ruling which paralyzed the work of the nominating commission at the 1942 convention -- the utterly stupid and reactionary principle that every member of the outgoing N.C. was, as a matter of course, to be reelected unless good cause was shown to remove him. That turns things upside down. Nobody can be "frozen" in any position in a revolutionary party. He must stand for election at each convention and the election must be free and open. Room must be left for competition and rivalry and differences of opinion to operate without artificial restraints. Members of the outgoing N.C. should be placed in exactly the same status as new aspirants -- as candidates for election. The nominating commission should adopt a rule to this effect at its first session.

The most practical next step is to take a preliminary poll to ascertain how many candidates are generally favored for election as national leaders who are not counted as representatives of any special district of the party. This will clear the road for the apportionment of the remaining places on the slate for local and district representatives. Here, again, there should be no "freezing" of old representation and no automatic closing of the door to new candidates from districts previously not represented. The object should be to provide the fairest possible representation of the districts in the new N.C. but the principle of proportional representation should be modified by other considerations; the relative importance of the district; the quality of the candidates; the special role played by certain candidates, etc.

The commission should announce the time and place of its daily sessions, and invite any delegate who wishes to argue for or against any candidate to appear and take the floor. The slate finally decided upon, either by agreement or majority vote, should be presented to the conven-

tion as the nominations of the commission. That leaves the floor open for other nominations and free discussion before the ballot is taken. Naturally one would have to have some good arguments for another candidate to hope to amend the slate of the nominating commission. But if he thinks he has a strong case, there is no reason why he shouldn't make the attempt. Adequate time and patience must be accorded for the presentation of any such proposed amendments. The heavens will not fall if a slate is amended once in a while.

One word more. The convention should not shunt the election of the new N.C. off till the last hurried half-hour of the convention, when impatience of departing delegations would tend to discourage full discussion and ample consideration of the various nominations. The best procedure would be to fix a definite hour and day to take up the election of the N.C. whether the rest of the agenda is finished or not at that time. This decision should be made demonstratively in order to call sharp attention to the vital importance of full and careful deliberation in selecting the party leadership. And even more important, the convention will thus give itself time to

do the job right.

All these measures will not guarantee the election of an ideal National Committee. But they should help to provide us with the best Committee that a free party can select from the material at hand by the method of party democracy. If the returning delegates go home with the feeling that this has been accomplished, the new N.C. will be able to begin its work with a strong authority. On the other hand, the leadership, precisely because of the care and deliberation taken in the selection of the personnel of the N.C., will feel itself to be more than ever under the watchful supervision and control of the party.

October, 1944

Note: If my remarks are sent abroad a postscript should be added to the effect that they are designed for the method of selecting the N.C. in our party, as it is today, at the given stage of its development, and are not meant as a universal formula. Every party must work out its own methods on the basis of its own experiences.