

MEMORANDUM ON THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION
by Farrell Dobbs

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 positions 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 opportunities 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 voluntary 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.

November 16, 1971

STATISTICAL BREAKDOWN OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE ELECTED AT 1971
CONVENTION

<u>NC</u>	regular:	older	4	middle	15	younger	9
	alternate:				8		14
	combined:		<u>4</u>		<u>23</u>		<u>23</u>

regular older: Breitman, 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

alternate
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),
Kirsch (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

advisory: Alvin, Cannon, Chester, Harer, Kerry, Liang, Reed, Trainor
dropped: Mayhew

PC 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

Nominating Commission

Ilona Stanton, Atlanta
M. Singler, Austin
M. Zimmermann, Boston
Wendy Reissner, Brooklyn
L. Sheppard, Chicago
Bruce Marcus, Cleveland
Peggy Brundy, Detroit
Jeanette Tracy, Houston
Andrea Davis, Los Angeles
Susan LaMont, Lower Manhattan

John Studer, Oakland-Berkeley
Phil Hardy, Portland
Fred Stanton, Philadelphia
Alan Stancliff, San Diego
Jessica Star, San Francisco
Mike Kelly, Seattle
Bill Anderson, Twin Cities
P. Seidman, Upper West Side
Steve Chase, Washington, D.C.
Steve Bloom, Denver