

# YSA

# Discussion Bulletin

Vol. XIX No.3

October 1975

\$ .40

## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
A MODEST PROPOSAL, by Elaine Hebel, Mallen Kear, and Ron Yankey, Portland local	2
EDUCATION -- KEY TO BUILDING AND CONSOLIDATING THE YSA, by Douglas Pensack, Detroit local	5
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION ON THE STRUGGLES OF PUERTO RICANS IN THE UNITED STATES, By Jose G. Perez, Lower East Side, New York local	6
PRESENTATION TO THE FOURTEENTH NATIONAL YSA CONVENTION ON THE PUERTO RICAN STRUGGLE IN THE UNITED STATES, By Jose G. Perez (This report was presented to the YSA convention on December 30, 1974.)	8
HOW TO SELECT A LEADERSHIP, By James P. Cannon	13

## A MODEST PROPOSAL

By Elaine Hebel, Mallen Kear, and Ron Yankey, Portland local

The most elemental and important facts about an organization are those that are seldom debated and generally taken for granted by its members. Assumptions that go unquestioned change in nature after a time to become assertions that dominate the thinking of those they affect.

In the Portland local we proceed under the established assertion that democratic centralism, as practiced and defined in Portland, encourages the full expression of views by all members, enhances individual political development, and widens the reservoir of leadership in the YSA. However, when this theory is concretized in order to test its accuracy, we find that the form of democratic centralism practiced in Portland fosters passivity and acceptance in the rank and file, leaving all analysis, creative thinking, and decision making in the hands of a few.

This is an unfortunate situation for each individual member and for the YSA as a whole. We cannot grow and we cannot function as a revolutionary youth leadership while the obvious contradiction in the interplay of democracy and centralism allows a visible distinction to be seen between the passive individual on the one hand, and an assertive few on the other.

It is not the purpose of this discussion to place blame or to aim criticisms in the direction of either the leadership or the rank and file. On the contrary, it is our contention that this situation arises as an effect of a problem inherent in our methods of organization. Under the present system, it is the exclusive responsibility of the executive committee (EC) to prepare proposals regarding a given political issue, to be delivered to the local. It is the exclusiveness of this particular responsibility that creates the imbalance of democracy and centralism. The Portland YSA business meeting itself is carried out by EC members who report on the area of activity each is assigned to. These reports (exec. report, anti-racism, campaign, finances, etc.) are characterized by brief analyses and summaries of recent past activities and proposals for future courses of action, and are usually delivered by an EC member. Following each of these reports, which run from five to seven minutes, the chairperson asks for a motion from the local to approve the report, discussion opens, discussion closes, and the report is stamped "approved."

One obvious explanation of consistent full approval of

proposals is that the EC always makes the correct proposal and the local is always in complete agreement. This is probably the case. But we are not concerned here with questions of leadership ability, correctness of proposals, or the absence of dissent. We are concerned, however, with the visible non-involvement of the rank and file during discussion, regardless of what constitutes such involvement.

All or most of the business meeting discussion is volunteered by those on the EC. To the incredulous and unconvinced, we offer as documented proof that this situation exists, the minutes of Portland YSA local meetings covering the past few years, which report individual participation in discussion. Simply by counting the number of times each person contributed to discussion, a very strong pattern will be found in which EC members contribute all or most, rank and file contributes little or none. This problem exists, not because EC members wish to dominate discussions or exercise their vocal cords or display their articulateness, and not because the mere existence of an EC robs rank and file members of their rights and responsibilities. The problem exists because the pattern of leadership participation/rank and file acquiescence creates self-perpetuating roles that force EC members to "accept" complete responsibility and gives rank and file members the opportunity to "surrender" that responsibility to the EC.

Since we are aware of similar discussions of this kind taking place throughout the history of our movement, we feel we must emphasize that this discussion was not prompted by any doubts or criticisms regarding EC political decisions or by unfounded concerns for the rights of rank and filers. We are in complete solidarity with the YSA's political aims and we are not suppressing political disagreements with the Portland local. All of our statements are directed toward the organizational methods practiced in Portland which, in our analysis, tend to perpetuate an undesirable polarization of the assertive and the passive. In order to rectify this trend we include at the end of this discussion a few proposals which we have considered in depth and believe to be viable solutions to the problem at hand. But first we would like to give our interpretation of a situation which really needs no documentation, and the question we would attempt to answer in the following remarks is "Why is it that in general rank and file members do not participate in discussion?"

In the YSA heavy emphasis is put on the belief that consistent political activity leads to leadership ability and earns a person the right to demonstrate his or her experience and knowledge. It is believed that qualities of leadership are acquired gradually, and that new and politically inexperienced members need leadership guidance and example as models to emulate. We, in describing the above process as an exercise of the imposing "upward mobile" mentality fixed in American culture, may not be totally fair. But there is a chance that by stating it this way we will get the point across. The ritual-exercise of aspiring-achieving, in the form described above, leads to a state of mind less admirable and more self-serving than we would wish: it is a state of mind, described by Marx, in which the artificially created need to succeed imposed by capitalist society permeates the consciences of the well-intending. We believe that the "coming up through the ranks" argument to be an evasive one, the purpose of which is to justify the too slow political development of the rank and file as a whole. We allow that people progress at their own pace, that some reach their potential very quickly, and that some develop their talents on their own. But we are also aware that because of the unintentional but, nevertheless, intimidating influence of aggressive, politically experienced and accomplished leaders, many people feel the pressure of superior performance and shrink away from the overwhelming task of self-development. This self-development we speak of can become a long, drawn-out process when one has the opportunity to postpone it indefinitely, due to an overall dependent attitude toward the EC. It is easy to surrender one's responsibilities when one can fall back on a leadership that can make decisions, articulate them, and defend them with great alacrity. After all, one may rationalize, it takes years to acquire knowledge, gain experience, and develop skills like those of Comrade A or Comrade B. And who am I to question his intelligence or her authority. A similar observation was made by Jack Barnes in an article he wrote entitled, "Report on National Committee Perspectives and Election of Political Committee", (SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 33, No. 4, June 1975). He explains that:

"When people who are among the most experienced and capable the Bolshevik movement has ever produced are sitting in the room, there is often an unconscious desire to let them have the final say, let them really make the decisions, and maybe not make a remark that might be wrong, because when you get criticized you're a little embarrassed."

And so it goes. Our remarks should in no way be received as an indictment, as all of us understand and should be willing to admit the powerful subjective appeal an organization such as the YSA has to new socialist-minded people with capacity for action, intervention and response. But as a contagious feeling of loyalty works on us as a therapeutic release from our inactive, cynical, or politically impotent past, we begin to place too much faith in others—those who were there before us and who we, understandably, give full credit for the "brain work" behind the operation. But,

regardless of justifiable credit-giving, we must consider the need of new members and growing rank and filers to participate, not only in YSA action, but also in YSA intellection.

In speaking of intellectual work and the psychological consequences of its being delegated to a few, we wish to elaborate here on the nature of the EC itself. In addition to the superior performance of the EC which acts as an intimidation, or at least as a contrast, for self-evaluating rank and filers, we think that there are obvious privileges conferred upon EC members which ingrain in each of them a sense of dignity and personal worth as responsible "thinking" members of the YSA. One privilege granted them is direct participation in the decision-making process. That is, confronted with a given political question or situation, the EC meets in closed session (rank and file members are denied admittance to EC meetings), and each member contributes in the collective act of "thinking out" an appropriate course of action. The act of actual participation in the thinking processes that culminate in a political decision is a privilege which gives an individual:

- (1) the experience of taking the initiative in discussions
- (2) access to the criteria for political decision-making
- (3) a sense of accomplishment in seeing his or her ideas materialized through action by the local
- (4) leadership responsibility
- (5) confidence in his or her intellectual abilities.

In contrast, the local functions merely as a rubber stamp which traditionally gives full approval to EC proposals. In local business meetings members listen to a brief summary of the thinking that precedes an executive political decision without directly participating, but by indirectly taking part via a voiceless vote. The vote, in short, is that passive, submissive involvement we in the YSA so emphatically define as democratic.

One thing we should consider here and now is the necessity for closed EC meetings. Why are they closed to rank and file members? The YSA Constitution does not specify "secrecy" as a function or a right of the EC, but simply states that the EC shall "act with the full authority of the local unit between meetings." The policy of secrecy remains unwritten and continues only from the prescriptive force of tradition. It is our understanding from discussions with individual EC members that the EC feels the need to meet privately because of some "delicate" matters discussed during those meetings. If such "delicate" matters exist, however, it is our contention that all YSA members have the right to know about them and about everything that affects them as YSA members.

A second privilege granted to the EC is discernable during the business meeting itself. Having prior knowledge of the contents of the agenda, and having experienced beforehand a discussion of the issues on the agenda, EC members are privileged in their readiness to defend their proposals. In this instance, the factor of "time" is quite significant, as a rank and file member who wishes to question or

challenge a proposal during discussion is confined to the demands of spontaneity. When the chairperson announces that discussion is open, that member must be able to explain himself on the spot. Perhaps there is a simple impulse to challenge a proposal or a deeply felt objection to something which, under more favorable conditions, could be thought out, analyzed, and delivered in a structured intelligible manner, that is, if that individual had had more time to think about the issue, and, ideally, had discussed it beforehand with others, like EC members are privileged to do.

The manner in which we exercise democratic centralism at the present time insures that we produce reliable, managed people who are accustomed, not to making correct political decisions, but who can be relied upon to nominate and elect those who will, hopefully, make correct decisions for them. The responsibility delegated to the EC has eliminated the necessity for thinking and decision-making on the part of the rank and file.

For the reasons given, we believe that a modest change in the character of the responsibility carried out by the EC will rectify what is amiss and eliminate its consequences. We propose the following changes:

(1) that the EC meet one or two days previous to the regular business meeting in order that a pre-agenda may be prepared--this agenda to be immediately distributed to all members of the local (in written form or over the telephone), for the purpose of allowing all members prior knowledge of the content of EC discussions, and an opportunity to consider them in advance.

(2) that reports on all areas of activity, (organization, finances, sales, antiracism, campaign, etc.), be delivered to the local as one report from the EC, and that it be delivered by a single member of EC (either the organizer or other EC member, on a rotating basis, if so desired for convenience and equal sharing of this responsibility). This is proposed as a time-saving device. One report by one individual on all areas of activity will allow more time for discussion, if necessary, by the local as a whole.

(3) that the content of the EC report be confined to organizational topics and to summary and analysis of YSA performance for the previous week.

(4) that political decisions and proposals for future activity be initiated during discussion in the presence of the entire local unit.

We believe these changes will result in diminishing the tendency toward passivity by involving all members directly in the decision-making-thinking process. We believe that our proposals offer more in the way of leadership guidance in that all members will be exposed to the thought-processes of their leadership during the business meeting discussion period.

We feel that it is important to stress the fact that if our proposals are adopted in Portland it will not signify the changing of political positions of the YSA. On the contrary, our proposals will more than likely serve to strengthen the basic understanding of the YSA's politics by the rank and

file members. As all members have the opportunity to become involved in planning political intervention and in applying the YSA's perspectives to concrete situations, the membership will gain a real knowledge of the meaning of the YSA's politics. This will result from the rank and file members having the chance to hear the Portland leadership who, no longer talking only among themselves in a private EC meeting, will be able to share their experience and understanding. It will also result from the rank and file having more of an opportunity to express opinions and to raise questions than is found under the present system, for reasons noted earlier.

Though we expect discussions in the Portland YSA business meetings to become expanded if our proposals are adopted, we don't envision the meeting itself increasing very much in length, given the length of the average EC and business meetings now. In fact, our second proposal is designed to enable information to be reported to the local in a much more efficient and concise manner. Furthermore, all members of the YSA, upon joining, state their agreement with the fundamental perspectives of the YSA. Those perspectives will not be debated in the local business meeting but, instead, differences will be reserved for discussion at the proper time, -- during pre-convention discussion. Disagreements arising during discussion about future political activity will not become unnecessarily prolonged and drawn-out. If a proposal by an EC member or any other member is the correct one, those supporting it will be able to explain their position in such a way as to convince the majority of its correctness, and at that point discussion will undoubtedly end. It must be emphasized that our proposals not only increase the opportunity of the rank and file members to become more educated in Marxist politics, but they also increase the opportunity of the EC members to demonstrate real leadership ability, by planning political activities with the whole membership and by explaining rationales for proposals when those proposals are not understood.

It is an exciting period that the YSA is now entering. More and more opportunities exist for the YSA to become involved on college campuses, in high schools, and elsewhere, as an increasing number of young people are attracted to the YSA. In order to meet the challenge of this upcoming period, we feel that it is imperative to change the YSA organizationally. Not only must newer members have the immediate opportunity to learn by becoming involved in the decision-making process, but older comrades, too, need the exposure to fresh insights and ideas offered by those newly radicalized. We feel that if our proposals are adopted, the YSA local in Portland will be taking an important step toward an effective and acceptable form of democratic centralism.

October 12, 1975

## EDUCATION -- KEY TO BUILDING AND CONSOLIDATING THE YSA

By Douglas Perlsack, Detroit local

It is often said, and accurately so, that the YSA is an activist organization. Unlike many of our sectarian opponents on the left, we do not spend an inordinate amount of time on theorizing, quotation-mongering, or hair-splitting. Rather, YSAers are actively involved in the concrete struggles on high school and college campuses and in the Black community.

During the anti-war movement many organizational aspects of the YSA suffered due to the all-out effort we put in anti-war coalitions (sales and finances are the most outstanding examples.) This was true for our educational program as well. Since the end of the anti-war movement the YSA has consolidated itself considerably; it is a tighter, more efficient organization in many ways, more experienced and sophisticated. Our sales and finances have improved considerably.

One area the YSA has not made sufficient progress in upgrading, in my opinion, is educational work--particularly internal education. The YSA should be an activist organization but there has to be an ideological and theoretical base for that activism. It's almost trite to say it, but almost always the most active and effective comrades are those that understand our program the best and can consequently articulate it to others. But this understanding does not just drop out of the sky.

It is true that individual reading and investigation are an important aspect of developing a revolutionary. However, it is not enough to depend on each comrade doing that on their own. The YSA locals must organize ambitious internal educational programs to educate our members in the basic Marxist theories on economics, historical materialism, the national question, etc. This is not strictly "internal," either, as this program can also be used to recruit people who are close to the YSA. One thing I'd like to see the 1975 YSA Convention recommend is a high priority on educational programs and some national direction to locals on how to concretely carry it out.

I think that this becomes even more important considering (1) we are recruiting people on generally lower political levels than in the early 1960's, and, (2) our recruitment is increasing and will continue to increase. We recruit many people but lose too many of them--our turnover is too high. One reason this is true is because we have not taken an aggressive enough attitude toward educating our new members in the basics of our program. Many have drifted away from the YSA because they did not recognize the paramount political importance of being in the YSA --

a shortcoming of the local leaderships as well as a personal failure.

It is true that there probably is not one local of the YSA that does not feel at least a little bit pressured to do all the tasks before it--to take advantage of all the opportunities that exist for us at this time. Many executive committees will say, "Yes, internal education is important, but..." They may even assign a leading comrade to head up an educational program--which every local should. However, the first time there is a time crunch and the local needs an additional person in an area of mass work or wants a shorter local meeting, too often it has been the educationals that go out the window.

Many comrades in the YSA have heard various things about the work of the Bloomington local. All things considered, Bloomington has been the most successful regional local of the YSA for the last three or four years. It has had between 15-30 comrades during that period and has recruited 20-30 comrades per year. One reason for this success, I think, has been the high priority it has placed on educational work, both internal and public. Every T&P, at least while I was in the local and since, has projected educationals on basic Marxist subjects, which were also used for recruitment of close contacts. Fairly high level educationals allowed us to do some important work with several international students there--particularly Arab students.

This is not just a responsibility of each local's leadership, either. It is also a responsibility of the regional center locals to prioritize educational work in locals in its region as well as within its own local. The center must prioritize the sending of leading comrades into the region--for week-end educational series, for example. We have done this several times from Detroit in collaboration with the SWP; it has been very successful. (This type of educational work has the added benefit of helping the center build the region, too, by helping to recruit people to regional locals and better equip regional comrades to do recruitment on their own, as well.)

The YSA has the experience and sufficient numbers to carry out this very important area of work. It should not be seen as taking away from our other areas of work, either. The success of our mass work and recruitment work depends upon us having YSAers knowledgeable enough of our program and its historical significance.

October 14, 1975

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION ON THE STRUGGLES OF  
PUERTO RICANS IN THE UNITED STATES

By Jose Perez, Lower East Side, New York local

Following is an edited version of the presentation on the struggles of Puerto Ricans in the United States given to the 1974 Young Socialist Alliance National Convention. Prior to the 1974 convention, the National Executive Committee decided that this presentation should be made to the national convention as a way of initiating a discussion within our organization on the Puerto Rican struggle within the United States. As such, the presentation was not discussed or voted on by the convention, although the general line had been approved by the National Executive Committee.

This document does not try to make a full-blown analysis of the Puerto Rican population in the United States. Nor does it attempt to outline a program for the liberation of Puerto Ricans. Nor does it take up the question of the YSA's tactics for advancing the Puerto Rican struggle in a complete and rounded way.

Its purpose is to describe some of the characteristics of Puerto Rican oppression in the United States; some of the kinds of struggles that Puerto Ricans have been involved in; some of the prominent Puerto Rican radical organizations; and what the YSA's general attitude towards the Puerto Rican liberation movement is.

Since our last convention, there have been important developments in the movement, which generally confirm what was said in the presentation:

1) The Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization has continued to steer a sectarian, Maoist course with some influence on a few campuses in New York City, where they are important political opponents of our campus fractions. Their sectarianism and rabid anti-Trotskyism is exemplified by their behavior at the February 1975 National Student Conference Against Racism, where they helped organize an antidemocratic disruption of that gathering because of their opposition to desegregation.

2) A number of the activists drawn around the committee that organized the October 31, 1974, demonstration in Madison Square Garden for Puerto Rican Independence transformed that committee into the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee at a conference last March. Since then, this group has continued to carry out a number of activities in solidarity with struggles in Puerto Rico, such as the tour of Puerto Rican union leader Pedro Grant last spring. The major political influence in the committee continues to be the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. YSA locals should continue to work with the PRSC around specific activities in solidarity with struggles in Puerto Rico, including the struggle for independence.

3) The Puerto Rican Socialist Party continues to be the main, organized expression of radical, nationalist sentiment among Puerto Rican youth in the United States. Unlike PRRWO, it is not a hardened sect, Maoist or otherwise. Its political positions continue to be influenced in a contradictory fashion by the varying tendencies in the world workers movement, the traditions of the Puerto Rican independence movement, and by the test of events.

For example, during the course of the past year the PSP has moved away from their previous refusals to criticize terrorist actions in the U. S. carried out purportedly in support of independence. The PSP has recognized that such actions do not help to effectively mobilize broad support for Puerto Rican independence.

On the other hand, this group -- like many others throughout the world -- has supported the Stalinist/ultraleft line on the Portuguese events.

As noted in the presentation, the PSP in the United States focuses much of its activity around support to independence and in solidarity with struggles on the island. But they have also started to become somewhat more active around struggles directly related to the problems of Puerto Ricans in the United States -- struggles such as the New York City District 1 community-control fight, protests against cop brutality, and others. In these struggles, our comrades have had an opportunity to work together and discuss with more PSP members than previously.

4) In connection with this, it is important to note the recent decision of the Federacion Universitaria Socialist Puertorriquena (FUSP -- Federation of Puerto Rican Socialist University Students), to affiliate with the National Student Coalition Against Racism. The FUSP is a U. S. -based organization in political solidarity with the PSP that has chapters on a number of campuses in New York, Illinois, New Jersey, and New England.

While not completely in agreement with all of NSCAR's positions -- particularly on busing -- FUSP has become involved in the student coalition because it is interested in fighting racism in its various manifestations: such as cutbacks, frame-ups, cop brutality, and in struggles for bilingual and bicultural education and community control of the education of Puerto Rican students.

NSCAR's positions on these issues and its action orientation is what has largely motivated FUSP's decision to join the student coalition. This confirms the validity and attractiveness of the basic concept behind NSCAR, that of an action-oriented, multinational youth organization that

fighters racist attacks.

This also presents important opportunities for the YSA to work more closely with young Puerto Rican socialists and discuss the whole range of our ideas with them.

5) In early September, there was an international conference in solidarity with Puerto Rico, organized on the initiative of the Cuban Communist Party and the PSP. It primarily involved forces from the world peace council, which is closely associated with the pro-Moscow Stalinists throughout much of the world.

Objectively, this conference gave a boost to the Puerto Rican independence movement. Among other things, it reaffirmed the unambiguous refusal of the Cuban leadership to give up its active support for Puerto Rican independence, at a time when the Cuban leaders are under intense imperialist pressure to do so in exchange for improved trade and diplomatic relations with the United States.

Also, it is part of a long-term effort by various pro-independence groups to use forums like the United Nations, conferences of non-aligned countries, and other international bodies to expose U. S. colonial domination of the island, thereby helping to mobilize international support for independence.

6) There has been a new committee formed in New York for the freedom of five Puerto Ricans, members of the Nationalist party, who have been in U. S. jails longer than any other presently incarcerated prisoners in this country, and, as far as is known, the whole Western Hemisphere.

This committee has scheduled a demonstration in front of the United Nations on November 1. Similar actions are planned in Chicago and the West Coast. The YSA in New York City has been able to play a role in helping to publicize this action, thereby coming into contact with a number of activists we had not had an opportunity to work with recently.

The YSA supports the immediate, unconditional release of the five nationalist militants. The actions the five carried out were a response to and a result of the brutal U. S. imperialist military invasion and plunder of the island. The government is keeping the five in jail today, not for things that happened more than twenty years ago, but because the five refuse to renounce their militant pro-independence positions. This is proven by the fact that the United States has offered parole to several of them, but only if they accept conditions which would restrict the nationalists' activities.

The struggles of Puerto Ricans in the United States and U. S. domination of Puerto Rico are important questions for the YSA as a national organization.

The Puerto Rican population in the United States has

been growing numerically and expanding geographically. As our own movement expands geographically, the YSA will have stronger locals in a number of cities in the North-east where there are significant Puerto Rican populations. In addition, the struggles of Puerto Ricans and the fight for independence are questions which have important national ramifications for all YSA locals.

For these reasons it cannot be a question that is left solely to the locals that are directly involved in work among Puerto Ricans; the whole YSA must become familiar with, discuss out, and make decisions on this.

This presentation is an initial contribution to that discussion. In it there are some things that we will undoubtedly discover as the discussion progresses that are insufficient, one-sided, or wrong.

For example, one question that is touched on in the presentation, yet has more and more clearly emerged as a focus of struggle by Puerto Ricans in bilingual and bicultural education.

Basically, the issue is a simple one. It can be demonstrated very easily that children cannot learn in a language they do not understand. So to deprive them of instruction in their own language is, in fact, to deprive them of the right to an equal education.

Closely related to this is the concept that Puerto Ricans be given an education that relates to their own background and culture, that does not seek to deprive them of their own language, history, and national identity.

This is an important part of the overall struggle against racism in education. It seeks to desegregate not the facilities and resources which are made available to Puerto Ricans, but rather what goes on inside the classroom. The YSA supports bilingual-bicultural education wholeheartedly, just as we support busing to desegregate the school facilities. At both NSCAR conferences, for example, the YSA supported motions against maneuvers by bodies like the racist Boston school committee to pit desegregation through busing against bilingual education.

In addition, there are several important other questions that are not dealt with in this presentation. An example is the question -- widely debated in the Puerto Rican left -- of whether Puerto Ricans in the United States are still part of the same national population as Puerto Ricans on the island or whether those in the United States have evolved into a clearly distinct national group.

For these reasons, it is to be hoped that other YSA members will contribute to an ongoing discussion within our organization on the Puerto Rican movement.

October 17, 1975

PRESENTATION TO THE FOURTEENTH NATIONAL YSA CONVENTION  
ON THE PUERTO RICAN STRUGGLE IN THE UNITED STATES

By Jose G. Perez

(This report was presented to the YSA convention on December 30, 1974)

The purpose of this presentation is to begin a discussion within the Young Socialist Alliance nationally on the struggle of Puerto Ricans in the United States. In this way it is different from the line reports that have been presented to the convention. Because of this, there will be no plenary discussion or vote. However, at the workshop on the Puerto Rican struggle comrades will have an opportunity to discuss this presentation and how we can most effectively participate in the Puerto Rican movement in the U. S.

Since the last national gathering of our movement in August, 1974, four significant actions have occurred in relation to Puerto Ricans in the United States.

The first was the protest in Newark against the savage police attack on the annual Hispanic Festival, which takes place in that city at the beginning of September. There were several protest rallies and demonstrations, some of which were also attacked by rioting police, leading to the murder of two Puerto Ricans. A coalition formed in response to the government's savagery demanded that the Puerto Ricans who had been arrested be released, that an independent investigation of the police brutality take place, and that the cops who brutalized the community be brought to justice.

The second event was the suspension of Luis Fuentes, school superintendent in New York City's District 1. This was an important development in the continuing fight in District 1, where the predominantly Puerto Rican community of the Lower East Side of Manhattan has been waging a fight for several years for community control of the schools. At the beginning of this fall's school term, the racist Shankerite majority of the local school board also removed principals who had been appointed by previous, pro-community-control school superintendent, Luis Fuentes. This sparked a response that included many protests of several hundreds, school boycotts, and sit-ins at some of the schools.

The third action was the October 27, 1974, rally of 15-20,000 at Madison Square Garden for "Independence for Puerto Rico." This was not only the largest pro-independence demonstration ever held in the United States, but also the largest organized protest of Puerto Ricans in this country.

The fourth was the struggle at Brooklyn College for Puerto Rican control over the appointment of an administrator for the Puerto Rican studies department. This was one of the largest student struggles to take place anywhere in the

U. S. this fall, reaching its high point with a one-day student strike and rally of 2,000.

These are just four of the more prominent fights that Puerto Ricans have been involved in in the last four months. These four struggles -- against police brutality, for community control of schools, for independence for Puerto Rico, and for student-faculty control of Puerto Rican studies departments -- express the diversified scope and massive character of the response by Puerto Ricans to their oppression. By themselves, they would indicate to the YSA the importance of this especially oppressed sector of America's working people. But to fully understand the significance of Puerto Ricans in the U. S. it is useful to look at the development of this oppressed national minority.

#### Puerto Ricans in the U. S.

The development of a large Puerto Rican population in the United States, which today numbers two million people, is a very recent one. When the U. S. took control of the island by force in 1898, there were only a few hundred Puerto Ricans in this country. Although there was some immigration during the first half of this century, the great migration started after World War II.

Since that time, the U. S. government has promoted a conscious policy of forcing Puerto Ricans to leave their homeland and come to the United States. Due to imperialist control of the island's economy, unemployment there has been at least 30 percent since the 1930s. Wages have been much lower than those in the U. S., but prices have been just as high or higher. To facilitate the pushing out of Puerto Ricans from their island, the federal government has set air fares between the U. S. and the island at a relatively low rate. It is a lower per-mile fare than the fares charged for flights of similar length in the United States.

At first this pushed-out population was concentrated primarily in New York, but over time it has spread, to the point where only about half this population lives in New York. The rest are primarily concentrated along the eastern seaboard, but there are also large Puerto Rican communities in Chicago, and one recent study indicated that there may be as many as 100,000 in California.

The migration is not all a one-way thing, and there are many who return to Puerto Rico each year. Nevertheless, a substantial permanent population seems to be developing.



One indication is that 40 percent of the Puerto Rican people in the U. S. were born here. The major portion of that 40 percent is very young; the overwhelming majority of adults were born on the island. If present trends continue, the next decade or two will see U. S. -born Puerto Ricans playing a larger and larger role in the Puerto Rican communities. Already differences between U. S. -born Puerto Ricans and the generation of their parents in culture, attitudes, and ties to the island are discernable. How these will further evolve remains to be seen.

In the United States, Puerto Ricans are subjected to economic exploitation, national oppression, and racial discrimination. It is very hard to obtain accurate figures on the extent of this oppression and its developments over the last twenty-five years, but the general patterns are clear. Puerto Ricans are among the last hired and first fired. They have the worst, most dangerous, and lowest-paying jobs. For example, the unemployment rate for Puerto Ricans is at least twice that for whites, and Lucille Rose, the Commissioner of Employment for New York City, estimated that the real unemployment rate among Puerto Ricans in that city is 25 percent. In New Jersey, a state that has a quarter of a million Puerto Ricans, the income of Puerto Ricans is 44 percent less than that for whites, and 17 percent less than that for Blacks.

Puerto Ricans are forced to live in some of the worst urban slums in the nation. Possibly the worst is South Bronx, where a quarter of a million Puerto Ricans live. Of these, the government estimates that 10-15,000 are drug addicts. Sixty of the eighty thousand housing units are "substandard, dilapidated, and in violation of the city code," according to New York City officials. The cops in South Bronx are so conscious of their role as an alien occupation army that they call their 41st precinct headquarters, "Fort Apache."

Herman Badillo, a Democratic Party politico not renowned for denunciations of the evils of the capitalist system described South Bronx this way: "Bad as the conditions were in Puerto Rico in the late 1930s when there was a depression in Puerto Rico that made our depression here look like prosperity, the conditions in South Bronx today are infinitely worse."

Housing, jobs, education -- in every sphere of American society, capitalism treats Puerto Ricans as inferior beings. But Puerto Ricans, inspired by the struggles of Blacks and other national liberation movements, have begun to organize and fight back against this oppression within the borders of the United States.

#### Development of the movement

The first signs of this awakening movement coincided with, and were inspired by, the massive ghetto rebellions of the Black communities that occurred in the mid and late 1960s. In 1966, there was a revolt against police brutality by Puerto Ricans on Chicago's northwest side. In 1967, it was a long, hot summer in East Harlem and other barrios in New York City. And there have been other rebellions in

many cities in New Jersey, in Boston, and many places where Puerto Ricans live in large concentrations.

In the late 1960s a Puerto Rican student movement developed. Within a couple of years Puerto Rican student organizations spread from one campus to another. Students demanded Puerto Rican studies departments, bilingual and bicultural education, and more Puerto Rican professors.

One of the most significant struggles of this time was a fight for open admissions at the city colleges of New York, the CUNY system. Many rallies and protests involving Puerto Ricans, together with Black students, were held. Despite government repression, major concessions were won, and the number of Puerto Rican students in CUNY schools quadrupled between 1967 and 1972.

Puerto Ricans have been involved in many other struggles. Some that are associated primarily with the Black liberation movement also included Puerto Ricans, for example, the 1971 Attica rebellion. If you look at the list of inmates murdered by Rockefeller you'll find several were Puerto Ricans. The prisoners' demands included a Spanish-language library and Spanish-speaking medical personnel.

A sector of the Puerto Rican population that is particularly oppressed are Puerto Rican farmworkers. Sixty thousand travel from Puerto Rico each year to be used as seasonal labor in U. S. fields. One fourth of these are covered by contracts negotiated between the Puerto Rican government and the growers. Under these agreements, the farmworkers are supposed to get at least minimum wage. The other three fourths don't even get that.

In Connecticut, migrant tobacco workers have organized the Asociacion de Trabajadores Agricolas (Association of Agricultural Workers). This association seeks to replace the Puerto Rican government as bargaining agents and wants to obtain a \$3-an-hour pay scale.

Puerto Ricans have been involved in movements against poor housing, for control of their institutions in their communities, for the right to use Spanish in voting, in school, and on the job. They have been involved in fights against the discriminatory hiring policies in many industries, like the construction industry in New York, and have demanded preferential hiring and upgrading of Puerto Ricans.

An important aspect of the struggles of Puerto Ricans has been solidarity with the pro-independence and workers movement on the island. A thousand strings tie Puerto Ricans in the U. S. to relatives and friends in Puerto Rico, including language, culture, the continuing migration, reverse migration, and vacation visits. Moreover, the existence of the Puerto Rican national minority in the U. S. is a direct product of the imperialist domination of the country and the policies that Washington has chosen to implement, which have forced hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans to come to the U. S. As Puerto Ricans here rebel against their oppression, it is easy for them to see how this oppression is intricately connected with the island's colonial status.

Actions expressing solidarity with the struggle against

colonial domination have not only occurred around general pro-independence slogans, but also around specific issues. For example, a few months ago there were protests at the United Nations against U. S. plans to set up a huge superport and refinery complex to process Mideast oil for U. S. mainland use. About a month ago, there was a rally in New York in solidarity with an important strike by government employees in Puerto Rico.

#### Progressive nationalist movement

This multi-faceted movement by Puerto Ricans in the U. S. is clearly a nationalist movement. This nationalism is a growing consciousness among masses of Puerto Ricans that they are oppressed because of their nationality, that, as a people, they are under attack. The central thrust of the movement is to take control over the lives of Puerto Ricans away from the racist rulers of this country and place it in the hands of the Puerto Rican people themselves.

The YSA completely supports the nationalist movement of Puerto Ricans; we identify wholeheartedly with the nationalist sentiment of the Puerto Rican masses; and we champion the demands of Puerto Ricans against their oppression.

We understand that the nationalism of the oppressed is totally different from the nationalism of the oppressor. The racist call for "white power" -- as the events in Boston show -- leads those white workers who identify with it to ally with the rulers of this country against the most oppressed sectors of the working class.

The nationalist call for "Puerto Rican Power" leads Puerto Ricans who identify with it to fight against the rulers of this country. Moreover, because of the overwhelmingly working-class composition of the Puerto Rican population, many demands that are raised are directed not only against national oppression, but also against class exploitation. Puerto Rican nationalism therefore also represents a step towards class consciousness by an especially oppressed sector of the working class.

Two programmatic concepts that have emerged in the nationalist movement are very important for the YSA. The first is the demand for Puerto Rican control over the institutions of the Puerto Rican communities, for Puerto Rican control over their own lives.

This demand -- community control -- has been at the heart of the struggle in New York's School District 1, the most prominent Puerto Rican struggle in the U. S. The battle in that community has been raging for several years, and through ups and downs, partial victories and defeats, the desire of the community to control the schools has mobilized repeatedly hundreds and sometimes thousands of working people.

A second is the demand for independence for Puerto Rico. The Madison Square Garden rally showed the great potential to organize and mobilize tens of thousands of people around this demand. The YSA supports this demand. We believe that Puerto Ricans have the right to self-determination, and that a substantial number favor independence

over statehood or commonwealth status. Furthermore, our support for self-determination is unconditional. For example, as Marxists we recognize that full national liberation for Puerto Rico is not possible without a socialist revolution there, and we support the struggle for a socialist Puerto Rico. However, we don't make support for a socialist Puerto Rico a pre-condition for participating in a struggle to demand that the U. S. government get out and let the Puerto Rican people themselves run their own affairs.

#### Class-struggle strategy

Both the District 1 protests and the October 27 pro-independence demonstration embody a very important strategic concept. This concept is the strategy of the independent mobilization of working people in mass actions around demands directed against the capitalist class and its representatives in the government. The strategy of massive independent action is very important. Through such actions, the working class and its allies learn to rely on their own strength and to fight for their rights against the government.

This strategy is totally different from and in contradiction to both reformist and ultraleft strategies for social change.

The reformist strategy consists of relying on liberal politicians to solve the problems of the masses. This strategy is based on the idea that the evils of the capitalist system can be reformed without abolishing the system altogether, and that there is a so-called "progressive" wing of the capitalist class which is both willing and able to carry out these reforms.

This is the concept which lay behind the Unidad Popular strategy in Chile. There, the leaders of the workers movement, especially those of the Stalinist Communist Party, told the masses to rely on the "good" military and the "good" capitalists. When the coup occurred, the masses were not prepared to defeat the savage attack unleashed by the capitalists and their army.

The ultraleft strategy substitutes the actions of a small group of revolutionaries for the independent action of the masses. The bombings of some U. S. companies' offices in New York shortly before the October 27 rally is an example of this strategy. The ruling class uses and sometimes even promotes these kind of actions to isolate revolutionaries from the masses of people, thereby making it easier to victimize leftists. The many unsuccessful attempts to carry out a revolution by small bands of armed guerrillas isolated from the masses that have occurred in Latin America in the last fifteen years show conclusively that this strategy doesn't work.

Among the most persistent exponents of the reformist strategy in the Puerto Rican movement are the Moscow Stalinists of the Communist Party and Young Workers Liberation League. For example, when Herman Badillo ran for mayor of New York in the Democratic Party primaries, the Communist Party's paper, the Daily World, joined ruling-class mouthpieces like the New York Times in backing

his campaign. But even Badillo himself admitted the total bankruptcy of his strategy when he told the New York Times that "It's going to take two, three or even more generations to start solving the problems" of the Puerto Ricans living in South Bronx. That's the real meaning of Democratic Party politics -- wait forever before even beginning to solve the problems!

One of the main exponents of the ultraleft strategy is the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (PRRWO). PRRWO has been part of the effort by several Maoist organizations to get together to build a new "Communist" party. Due to its history in the Puerto Rican student movement, PRRWO exercises some influence on a number of campuses in New York and is a serious opponent of the YSA.

PRRWO originally started out as the Young Lords Organization in New York City. Initiated by a number of college students, it quickly became the largest and best-known militant Puerto Rican nationalist organization. Among the most prominent leaders of the Young Lords at first were a number of Afro-Boricuas, Black Puerto Ricans, some of whom had participated in the Black liberation movement and who were influenced by the major currents in the Black movement.

At that time, the Young Lords participated in a number of militant actions that won it great prestige among young radicals. For example, they helped to initiate a struggle to make Lincoln Hospital, which "serves" the South Bronx community, responsive to the people's needs. Many of the Lords were prominent leaders of the Puerto Rican Student Union that had chapters on many New York campuses. The Lords were active around many issues, ranging from the city's failure to collect garbage in East Harlem to the war in Vietnam.

The Young Lords had a thirteen-point program that reflected the militant, nationalist character of the group. The first point was: "We want self-determination for Puerto Ricans, liberation on the island and inside the United States." Other points included demands for community control, for immediate U. S. withdrawal from Vietnam, for bilingual, bicultural education, for equality for women, and for the right of Puerto Ricans to defend themselves against repression.

Despite many positive aspects of their program and activities, the Young Lords degenerated into a Maoist sect because of ultraleftism. As time went on, their rhetoric became increasingly violent, and their tactics more and more involved "militant" actions by isolated groups of Lords who could easily become victimized. Numerous accusations of different members and leaders being police agents were made, and large-scale purges took place, leading to a substantial shift in the composition of leadership.

The qualitative transformation from a militant, nationalist youth organization to a Maoist sect was completed by mid-1972, when the Lords changed their name to the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization. Since that time, they've continued as a Maoist sect, and have

lost much, but not all, of the influence they originally had. Their political outlook is exemplified by their activities in the Brooklyn College upsurge this fall, where their ultraleft tactics contributed to the demobilization of the students and consequently a setback for the Puerto Rican student movement.

#### The Puerto Rican Socialist Party

The group that has replaced the Young Lords as the main expression of militant, left-wing Puerto Rican nationalist sentiment is the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. The PSP, which grew out of an organization called the Pro-Independence Movement, is an extension of an island-based party.

In Puerto Rico itself, the PSP is the largest radical organization, and, from all we can tell, continues to grow. Just this November, for example, the PSP in Puerto Rico transformed its twice-weekly newspaper into a twenty-four page daily. PSP members are prominent leaders of a number of trade unions on the island, and its youth organization, the Pro-Independence University Federation (FUPI), is the largest left-wing political organization on the country's campuses.

In the United States, the PSP has grown rapidly in the last couple of years, establishing a bilingual weekly edition of their paper, setting up many new branches, and recently initiating a campus-based youth organization associated with their party called the Federacion Universitaria Socialista Puertorriquena (FUUSP -- Federation of Puerto Rican Socialist University Students).

In New York they have open headquarters and a bookstore, and they were the main force initiating the Madison Square Garden Rally for Independence.

In the United States the main activity of the PSP has been focused around the independence issue and solidarity with struggles on the island. Hence, they have often not played a major role in struggles like that of District 1.

The party in the U. S. is a group with diverse origins. Some of the leaders received their first political training in the student movement on the island; others came out of the student movement in the U. S., including some who had been part of various socialist groups in the United States.

Moreover, the PSP is influenced by the different positions of various groups in the workers movement here and internationally. They are particularly influenced by the traditions of the Nationalist Party in Puerto Rico, which in many cases engaged in small adventurist actions that, while they were very heroic, were ineffective in bringing an end to U. S. imperialist colonization. Also, they are influenced by groups like the MIR of Chile, and the ERP and left-wing Peronists in Argentina. And since their early days, the PSP leadership has maintained close ties with the leaders of the Cuban workers state. On international issues, the PSP frequently adopts the positions of the Cuban Communist Party.

The political positions of the PSP reflect these diverse and clashing influences.

Some of their positions are good. For example, at the

first convention of the U. S. section of their party in April 1973, a resolution was approved denying any support to capitalist politicians and specifically Herman Badillo, who at the time was running for mayor of New York with the support of the Communist Party in this country. During Badillo's campaign they ran several articles explaining that he was a capitalist politician. Recently, they took a positive attitude toward the December 14 antiracist mobilization in Boston, giving it prominent coverage in their newspaper and urging a big mobilization against the right-wing drive.

Other positions they have taken we disagree with. We think they often involve adaptations to either ultraleftism or Stalinism. One example is the position they took in relation to the expulsion of Solzhenitsyn, which simply repeated all the arguments of the pro-Moscow Stalinists. Another was their response to the publication of Prairie Fire, a book recently put out by the Weather Underground. PSP leaders gave great praise in their newspaper to this ultraleft and pro-terrorist tract.

However, what is decisive for us in determining our attitude to the PSP is not this or that political position of that party, but the fact that today it is one of the main organized expressions of militant Puerto Rican nationalist sentiment in the U. S. This doesn't mean that we bend to mistaken political positions of the PSP. It means that we have to be very conscious of formulating our criticisms so that they can't possibly be misunderstood as sideline, carping, sectarian attacks, but are clearly oriented toward convincing people and winning them to our views. The fact that the PSP is not a hardened Stalinist or social-democrat organization, but a heterogeneous organization makes it easier to work with PSPers and discuss with them.

#### Tasks of the YSA

Finally, I want to outline some general tasks of the YSA in relation to the Puerto Rican struggle in the coming months.

The first is to continue educating the YSA membership and other young radicals on the colonial domination of Puerto Rico, the oppression of Puerto Ricans in the U. S., and why North American working people should support Puerto Rican liberation. In carrying out this work, distri-

bution of the Militant and Young Socialist newspapers will play a major role. YSA members can also follow the Puerto Rican radical press, especially the PSP's paper, Claridad.

Second, the YSA will continue to support and give leadership to struggles of Puerto Ricans in the United States, advocating and implementing the mass-action strategy. In this respect, the participation of the YSA in the District 1 struggle has been exemplary.

Third, we want to build the Camejo-Reid campaign as one of our best vehicles both for publicizing Puerto Rican struggles and actions as well as for explaining our own strategy and tactics. The fact that Camejo is a Latino will open many doors for building the campaign among Puerto Ricans, and we should be aggressive in utilizing all the opportunities that open up.

Fourth, we want to involve young Puerto Rican militants and Puerto Rican organizations in the on-going antiracist struggle focused around the Boston busing issue. As we've been discussing at this convention, the racist drive in Boston is not only an attack on Black people, but is part of an overall offensive against the oppressed minorities. This is applicable to Puerto Ricans in a very immediate sense, since 1 percent of the population of Boston is Puerto Rican and they are also affected by the racist hysteria being whipped up there. Also, the fact that Jean-Louis Yvon, who was almost lynched last October, was not an Afro-American, but was a Black Haitian, should demonstrate that the victim of a racist attack could just as easily be a Black Puerto Rican.

Fifth, and this is our central task, we want to win young Puerto Ricans to the ideas of Trotskyism and to the YSA. We understand that for an American socialist revolution to be possible, it will have to be led by a multinational revolutionary vanguard that includes the best militants from the various sectors of the working class in this country. The central task the YSA set itself at the time of its founding, and which remains our most important job today, is to help build that revolutionary leadership. Armed with our revolutionary Marxist program, and our understanding of the dynamics of the different struggles of the exploited and the oppressed, we can make significant strides towards our goal of becoming a mass revolutionary socialist youth organization.

## HOW TO SELECT A LEADERSHIP

By James P. Cannon

(The following article on the election of the National Committee is reprinted from Letters From Prison.)

In our opinion the most important reason or 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 practically all other parties (strike out the word "practically") 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 percent 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 leader 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 makeup 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 NC—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, fully empowered leadership. But this states only one half of the prob-

lem. 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 NC, 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 farsighted leadership should concern itself with the elusive, intangible factors which can play such a great role in determining the actual relationship between the NC and the ranks.

Some of these factors arise from the composition of the NC and the division of functions within it. Nominally, this body consists of twenty-five members, and they all have equal rights. In addition there are fifteen 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 NC 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 handpicked.

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 NC. Extensive and varied experience, 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 NC 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 NC 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 overrule the Political Committee—and this has happened more than once, notably in 1938-1939—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 PC 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 handpicked 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 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 doesn't have to be exercised every day to be effective. The fact that it is 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 practices 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 NC. 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-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 NC, 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 representative—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 pro-

posal. 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 NC 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 NC 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 NC 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 NC; 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 convention as the *nominations* of the nominating 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 NC 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 NC 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 selec-

ting the party leadership. And even more important, the convention will thus give itself time to do the job right.

All of 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 NC 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 NC, will feel itself to be more than ever under the watchful supervision and control of the party.