

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE REPORT

by M. Vidal, August 13, 1972

We want to take the opportunity of having this gathering of the National Committee to raise a problem that the comrades in the center have been thinking about for some time, regarding the present structure of the central leadership of the YSA, and to propose some changes.

We wanted to bring the discussions we have already carried out in the National Executive Committee to the National Committee because the question of leadership structure and leadership selection is a central responsibility of the National Committee.

In a way, the question of YSA leadership is intimately tied to the overall question we began to discuss at the June plenum and have continued to discuss at this plenum today. That is, where the YSA is going, what changes it is undergoing, and what we want the YSA to become.

But beyond that, it is a question that the leadership of the YSA must continually rethink and reevaluate, to insure that the leadership structures that exist are on a par with the changing needs of the YSA and are the best possible forms for the leadership to carry out its functions at any given time.

What I want to discuss concretely in this report are the problems we now face with the present structure of the NEC and the Organization Committee, the formation of which was approved by the last convention of the YSA. In order to do this, however, we should first take a few minutes to review some of the background of the problem.

The National Executive Committee is a subordinate body to the National Committee, and is the highest decision-making body between meetings of the National Committee. Its function is to provide political direction for the work of the YSA nationally, within the framework of the political line adopted by YSA conventions and plenums, and to oversee the functioning of the National Office. That is a more or less constant factor behind the creation of the NEC. This report does not propose any change in the function of the NEC. But it is important to keep this function in mind in thinking through the problem we are now discussing.

In the past, the NEC has been elected at plenums of the National Committee on the basis of nominating all those full National Committee members resident in New York City. While this is not a written policy of the YSA, it has been a tradition for a number of years.

Until a couple of years ago, while the YSA was much smaller, this formula seemed the most logical to use since, by and large, the full NCers resident in the center were the central leadership of the YSA and consisted mainly of a small number of comrades working in the National Office.

As the needs of our movement grew, however, it became necessary to bring more and more comrades into the center to perform a variety of leadership functions, not all directly related to directing the work of the YSA on a national scale. In addition, the growth of the YSA, both numerical and qualitative, called for expanding the size of the National Committee and, in turn, the National Executive Committee, since a larger number of comrades in the center were elected to serve

on these leadership bodies. Presently, over half of the full National Committee resides in New York.

At a certain point, the problems related to growth began to manifest themselves in our leadership structures. We began to feel that discussions in the NEC did not adequately reflect the kind of thorough thinking-out of political questions and reports that needs to take place in a political leadership body. Discussions were too confined within the framework of very structured reports which tended to leave little room for open-ended, free-flowing discussions. NEC meetings seemed to reflect a feeling among comrades that reports were so thoroughly discussed and prepared beforehand that there was little need to add to what had already been said, and not, as should have been the case, that those types of discussions took place in the NEC itself.

Looking back on it now we see that the basic problem lay in the composition of the NEC, which, as it is presently constituted, was too large to be able to carry out the responsibilities of a central leadership body. At present, NEC meetings include the elected NEC of close to 20 comrades, as well as all other full and alternate NC members residing in New York City, and comrades working in the National Office not on the NC.

While we experimented for a period of time with minor changes and adjustments in the form of NEC meetings, and so on, we now realize that a more thorough change is needed.

We first recognized and started to grapple with the problem in the National Office. We thought the problem stemmed in part from the fact that reports to the NEC were too scrupulously prepared beforehand by a handful of comrades through informal collaboration in the National Office. In fact, the leadership responsibilities of the formally elected NEC were in reality being carried out, for the most part, only by the central leadership in the National Office.

In an effort to turn this situation around we began to look for ways to facilitate more thoroughgoing and informal discussions at the NEC meetings. This spring, for example, we experimented with different kinds of reports--less structured, and designed to provoke the fullest possible discussion. We were successful to some degree with the measures that we did take. The reports to the June plenum, for instance, were the product of more collaborative discussions in the beginning stages of preparing the reports because the NEC discussed the initial outlines for these reports instead of the full written drafts in their final stage of preparation.

That was one of several small reforms in the organization of the N.O. and the NEC. Another change intended to make our leadership structures more efficient was the establishment of the Organization Committee.

For a number of years, one of the functions of the National Office, as a subordinate body to the NEC, was that of preparing and going over reports for the NEC. This function corresponded to reality as long as the National Office staff remained relatively small and consisted of the central political leadership of the YSA. As the N.O. underwent considerable growth, however, more than doubling in a period of two years, this practice became cumbersome and inefficient. N.O. staff meetings were difficult to organize and tended to disrupt the smooth

functioning of the office.

In order to facilitate the functioning of the National Office, two steps were then taken. First, the practice of holding National Office meetings was discontinued. Second, a subcommittee of the NEC was formed whose function was primarily to prepare and organize NEC meetings. The Organization Committee was established as this subcommittee by the last YSA convention under the Organization Report.

The Organization Committee was based on the concept that the National Office staff would continue to expand rapidly to include comrades at different levels of political development with distinct responsibilities, not all of which would necessarily be central leadership responsibilities. An additional consideration in the formation of the Organization Committee was that having a smaller body preparing and going over reports to the NEC would tend to maximize discussion in the NEC itself and limit the extent to which the bulk of the discussion on important political questions took place in preparatory meetings prior to NEC meetings.

While the Organization Committee did facilitate, to some extent, the functioning of the National Office, its sole function remained that of preparing and organizing reports for meetings of the NEC. With so narrowly defined a function and no independent authority, the Organization Committee could not serve the purpose of a functional leadership body. In addition, the OC did not facilitate the kind of informal collaboration with various comrades in the leadership of the YSA that is often needed in preparing reports to the NEC.

The OC could not speak to a broader problem of leadership structure that the YSA now faces, primarily as a result of its growth. That is, the problem of putting together a political leadership body small enough to be a real leadership body with the authority to make decisions, that can meet frequently to discuss the questions and problems involved in giving direction to the work of the YSA on a day-to-day basis.

It became clear, in the course of thinking through the problem with our existing leadership structures, that the NEC, because of its present size, is unable to carry out the leadership functions formally delegated to it by the National Committee.

There are currently 19 comrades serving on the NEC. In addition, the NEC has had a tradition, as I mentioned before, of inviting to its meetings alternate NC members resident in New York and comrades working in the N.O. who were not on the NC, so that a total of over 30 comrades were invited to attend meetings of the NEC whenever they were held.

In assessing the leadership question and our experiences over the last few years, we have arrived at the conclusion that a different organizational form is necessary to carry out this function. We also feel that the OC does not speak to the real problem and should, therefore, be discontinued.

There are various alternatives open to us. One alternative we considered was to simply limit meetings of the NEC to the elected NEC members. This course, however, did not represent any significant solution to the problem. Were we to elect an NEC on the same basis of nominating all resident full NC members as has been done up to this point, the new NEC would consist of 20 comrades. A body of this size, while it may have a little more flexibility for its deliberations,

would still be too large to fulfill the role it was originally designed to fulfill.

Another alternative would be to take formal steps to give the Organization Committee decision-making power, as a subordinate body of the NEC, to hold less frequent meetings of the NEC, and delegate the central political leadership responsibilities to the OC. This would involve a constitutional change which we did not feel was necessary at this time since such a structure is already provided for in the YSA constitution, that is, the NEC.

It seemed more logical, then, to look at the NEC as it is presently constituted and consider what organizational changes in this body were needed to maximize the ability of the NEC to function in the capacity of a real, as well as a formal, leadership body.

The basic criterion the YSA uses in defining and selecting all leadership bodies is to make the formal leadership correspond as closely as possible to the real leadership.

Since the main hindrance to the NEC's functioning is the fact that it is too large a body, we concluded that the best possible alternative at this time is to elect a smaller NEC. Doing so would involve no constitutional change in the structure of the NEC. Technically speaking, it means merely discontinuing the tradition of electing an NEC on the basis of nominating all full National Committee members residing in New York City, and the tradition of automatically inviting to NEC meetings all other full and alternate NC members in New York, as well as other comrades in the N.O.

At the same time, the problem of constructing the best possible leadership structures is an ongoing process of vital importance to a democratic centralist organization and is one of the most important responsibilities of the national leadership. The decision to elect a smaller NEC, on a different basis than has been done in the past, is one step in this process.

For that reason, it also poses some important questions regarding leadership structure and leadership selection which we should weigh in arriving at an adequate slate of nominees to the NEC. That is, what should the composition of such a body be? What distinct functions will it carry out? On what basis should comrades be nominated to the NEC?

So before taking up the actual slate that I would like to propose on behalf of the outgoing NEC, and the criteria for nominating that particular slate of comrades, I would first like to review some of the general considerations that went into making those nominations.

The composition and size of the NEC should, first of all, be looked at in the context of its concrete tasks over the fall period--organizing the convention, giving direction to the YSA's new publication, and overseeing the work of the National Office.

These are functions that can only be carried out by a body that can provide leadership direction on a frequent basis.

For that reason, this body must be a small, flexible body which can meet frequently and informally to discuss a variety of political and administrative questions related to its main functions. It should also be a body that allows for the maximum informal consultation and collaboration among individual comrades on it, as the need arises. The administrative work involved in directing the work of the YSA from one day to the next would, of course, still be handled by the National

Office.

We should view this body as a flexible one, having somewhat of an experimental character which we will want to reassess at the time of the Thanksgiving convention and decide at that time whether or not this new organizational form fits the needs of the YSA on the basis of our experience with it in the next three month period.

Finally, we propose to supplement the leadership functions of the NEC by initiating the practice of holding periodic meetings of all National Committee members residing in New York City.

The resident NC meetings, which can be held fairly frequently, will serve to involve a broader layer of comrades in the national leadership in discussions over major political questions which would benefit from the contributions of other leading comrades who are not formally elected to the smaller body.

In other words, the purpose of the resident NC meetings would be to get the fullest possible discussion on major political questions whenever they came up. The resident NC meetings would not have to get bogged down with all sorts of more routine political and administrative problems and questions that come up in the course of the YSA's day-to-day work. Those will be handled through the NEC and directly through the central leadership in the N.O. This would give the resident NC meetings the freedom to discuss only major reports and developments in which we do want to get the thinking of the broader layer of national leadership comrades in New York.

For example, some of the functions that the resident NC meetings would serve include discussing the NEC's draft political resolution for the upcoming convention, contributing and giving direction to the pre-convention discussion, discussing major new developments in the independent movements the YSA participates in, and so on.

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The steps that we are proposing here--dissolving the Organization Committee, electing a smaller NEC, and holding resident NC meetings--more closely correspond to the present leadership needs of the YSA. Moreover, they place the central decision-making responsibilities directly where they belong--in the formally elected NEC, and not in the hands of a smaller group of comrades with no formal authority.

These then, are some of the general considerations to keep in mind in the process of electing the new NEC.

Now let's turn to the problem of nominating a slate for the National Executive Committee.

The problem we face at this point in selecting a small enough body so that it can carry out the central leadership functions on a day-to-day basis is that there is a larger number of comrades qualified to serve on this body than would be desirable to have, if it is, in fact, to play that role.

It is therefore necessary to lay down certain guidelines that can aid the process of putting together the most functional leadership body. In that sense, the election of the NEC is considerably different from the election of other leadership bodies, such as the National Committee, and our criteria for nominating comrades to the NEC must also differ somewhat from that used in selecting other leadership bodies.

In deciding who should be nominated to this type of National

Executive Committee, there are two main criteria we should use: the leadership stature and general political development of each individual comrade and the comrade's current leadership function.

It is important to weigh both of these factors together in evaluating the comrades to be nominated for two reasons.

The first is simply the need to draw a certain dividing line between the large number of comrades that qualify to serve on the NEC and the smaller number we must elect so that we can arrive at a functional body.

The second reason is that, in deciding who should be elected to the NEC, one important factor to consider is that the comrades serving on the NEC, in addition to providing general political direction to the work of the YSA, also add to the process of fulfilling the NEC's leadership responsibilities on the basis of the particular function they currently have in the YSA. That is, those comrades on the NEC should be able to provide the NEC with the knowledge and experience they acquire through their central role in various important areas of the YSA's work.

For the purposes of this body, we do not want to view the level of political development of a comrade and the contributions each individual can make, abstracted from the functions they serve at this time. If we were to do that, then we would have to include a much larger number of comrades than would make this NEC a functional leadership body.

While we do want to set certain guidelines, however, our main criteria must still be that of nominating comrades on an individual basis, taking into account both their leadership stature and capabilities, as well as their current function.

What we want to avoid is falling into the trap of having these flexible, temporary, and experimental guidelines become, over a period of time, hardened rules that are then rigidly followed. For example, we will not necessarily always want to include on the NEC a comrade playing a leading role in the antiwar movement, or a comrade assigned to the New York citywide apparatus, or a comrade assigned to the National Office, solely on the basis that they are National Committee members carrying out important functions. This is especially true in the case of the National Office staff, which has the long term perspective of continuing to expand to include a large number of national leadership comrades.

Comrades should keep these criteria in mind in weighing the slate of comrades that I would like to propose in this report.

As it stands, the slate is composed primarily of comrades of proven leadership ability, who will carry the central responsibility for directing the work of the YSA in the fall period. It includes, at this time, comrades in the central leadership of the National Office, and National Committee members currently carrying out central leadership functions in other national departments, mass work, and the New York citywide YSA.

These comrades have been carefully weighed against other comrades who are capable of playing equally central a role on the NEC, but most likely would not be able to play that role in practice because of the nature of their assignments.

Again, our purpose should not be simply to draw up a list of comrades whom we consider the central leaders of the YSA. Rather, our

main consideration in electing the NEC should be that of keeping this body as small as possible and arriving, within the framework of its size limitations, at the best possible central leadership team, so that we can go into the fall better equipped with adequate organizational structures to fit our political needs.

I now submit the following recommendations to the plenum on behalf of the National Executive Committee:

1) To approve the action of the outgoing NEC in dissolving the Organization Committee.

2) To elect an NEC of 12 members.

Finally, I would like to nominate the following slate of 12 comrades to the NEC: Fowlkes, Hawkins, Lovgren, Miah, Miller, Mirelowitz, Pulley, A. Rose, Rowand, Vernier, Vidal, Welch.