

BEHIND DETROIT'S ELECTIONS

By ABNER W. BERRY

Detroit

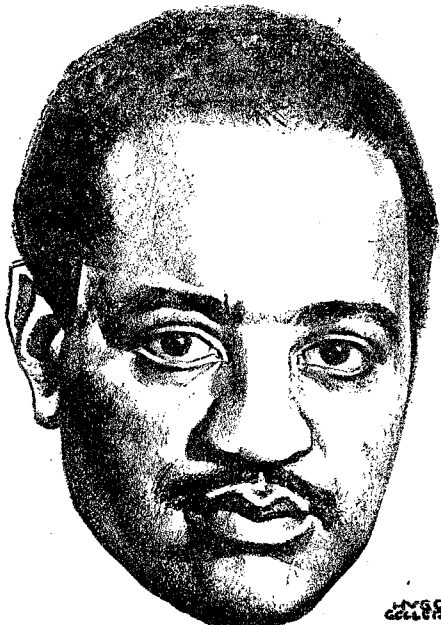
DETROIT is in the home stretch of what appears to be one of the closest electoral battles in many years. Mayor Edward Jeffries, son of a distinguished liberal who has proved false to his father's political faith, is desperately trying to stem the progressive tide behind Richard Frankenstein, big, youthful vice president of the United Automobile Workers-CIO. Frankenstein led Jeffries in the primaries, but as the experience of 1943 proved, it is possible for the situation to be reversed on election day.

Outstanding feature of the campaign is that for the first time organized labor has given political leadership to the whole democratic camp, welding it into an organized coalition, and leading it into battle against the entrenched Republican reactionaries. The once powerful Democratic Party here is a segment of the coalition. I say "segment" because the Democrats relate to the coalition as a slice relates to an orange. Labor, large sections of the middle class, the Democrats and the Negro people are fighting this battle together.

Breadth and the straining for even more breadth, however, can become a danger, as Frankenstein learned. In trying to represent *all* of the people of Detroit he went to the extreme at one point in his campaign of promising tax leniency to the corporations. I was reminded of an incident in Harlem right after the 1935 outbreaks when a number of us met in the home of the Rev. A. Clayton Powell to discuss the next steps to normalcy. In the midst of the meeting the doorbell rang and a police lieutenant was ushered in. A silence fell over the room which was broken by James W. Ford, Negro Communist, who protested: "This united front is getting too broad!" There was a feeling among many of Frankenstein's supporters here that that was the case in his campaign. He got the point. And in recent days there has been a noticeable pick-up in the strength and the direction of his swing.

Aside from the general issues na-

tionally and internationally facing the people here (issues which get far too little attention), the real "hot potato" is housing. Behind the housing issue is the question of what to do with the swollen Negro population. For without providing housing for the Negroes there will be no housing for *anyone* in the city. Jeffries has taken the offensive on this issue by stating flatly he stands for freezing the "racial characteristic of the neighborhoods." He has taunted Frankenstein to come out for "bi-racial housing." This is the smoke screen behind which the wily Jeffries proceeds to peck at the unity of the coalition along racial lines. And behind him, in the scheme to maintain the present overcrowded conditions in white as well as Negro neighborhoods, are the real estate interests and the banks which have enjoyed rich rent and mortgage pickings for years. This is at the bottom of the so-called "race issue" which seems to be such a hardy perennial here.



In New York thousands of Ben Davis' admirers are ringing doorbells to guarantee his reelection to City Council. More are needed. We urge our Manhattan readers to do their bit—every vote counts!

The peculiarity of the Negro question in Detroit is that all civic improvements hinge on what is done to house the Negro population. Along the waterfront, the development of which is a big issue here, and as far north as Gratiot Street, is a triangle of land bearing the highest assessed value in Detroit. This is the worst slum area in the country. Proposal after proposal to condemn the shacks now squatting there have been made, only to come up against the unanswered question of: "What are we going to do with the Negroes living there without breaking the principle of retaining the 'racial characteristics of neighborhoods?'" And so with enlarging the airport and with the proposed Medical Center. It is a vicious circle with the landed boys having all of the fun. Everyone here is aware of the issue, but to those on top in politics the attitude is that "It's dynamite." So no one touches it. That is, not openly and in public. But it is discussed and it is an issue that is very much alive. And there is no doubt that a victorious coalition candidate will do something about it.

Discussion of issues, however, would be academic without organization. Mayor Jeffries has squealed many times about the "efficiency" of his opponents, which in itself is a tribute to the organizational job done. "The National PAC is the smoothest working political machine that ever hit this town or any other town," he told a luncheon rally recently. "They have unlimited money and have imported a small army of professional organizers. They are out ringing doorbells and they are going to get out the vote. They are going to take over this town unless the great unorganized majority has the interest to go to the polls."

Jeffries spoke largely the truth. However, what he terms a foreign invasion is really the majority, taking a lead from labor, organizing to control its city government. In every congressional district there is a PAC coordinator. This coordinator, in turn,

controls a precinct organization. And in every precinct there is a head and a crew of workers. There has grown up in this campaign a political organization of a new type. It is a people's organization and no matter what the candidates may say in their public speeches the people are voting for the issues talked over at front doors and in the local PAC headquarters.

THE results of the organization's work are already shown in the registration just completed. Over 802,000—a record for a city election here—came out. This is seen as a definite advantage to the Frankenstein followers.

Sparkplug of the Frankenstein forces among the Negroes is the Reverend Charles A. Hill, Negro candidate for Councilman. The dynamic clergyman, with a high, balding brow and copper skin, has taken his speeches from the church rostrum to the people. In chatting with him about the attitude of the Negroes I got one answer: "The Negroes are tired of the race-baiting that Jeffries has encouraged for years. I want him out, and they think Frankenstein is the right man to replace him."

I saw Frankenstein quite by accident. While in the office of another official someone yelled through the door: "The Mayor wants to see you!" My host excused himself with, "Well, I guess that's one call I'd better heed."

I ambled into the outer office of "The Mayor" and was getting a few handouts and bits of information from his press representative, George Miller, when the door to the inner office opened and Frankenstein bounded out.

"Look at this!" he yelled to a secretary. "This guy Jeffries says that we have an efficient machine. Well, that's more than I can say for Jeffries."

He then went on to dictate a section of a speech he was to make that night utilizing the information just culled from the press. As he turned to go into his office he saw me and rushed over to shake hands and introduce himself.

Going into his office, Frankenstein clapped his hands together small boy fashion and said to his press man: "Do you know, George, that Jeffries' opening speech was made in an undertaker's establishment? That's fine, huh? I think I should mention that in one of my speeches. An undertaker's establishment. Yes, I'll mention that and say, 'Jeffries' opening speech in an undertaker's establishment might have been an assurance for a resting place for the political corpse on November 6.' That's it! And it's true. We'll bury him!"

I won't make any guesses about the outcome of the election. A poll was recently taken here by a group which came from Yale. It showed that forty-nine percent of the population as a whole were for Jeffries; in the Negro communities Jeffries had twenty-four per-

cent. Most Frankenstein campaign workers disagree, believing that the poll exaggerated Jeffries' strength. There is no doubt that the coalition behind Frankenstein has the reactionaries worried. What they may be planning for the last days of the campaign no one can tell. For a while the auto companies hoped that by provoking a sharp clash over the UAW's wage demands they would frighten middle-class voters into supporting Jeffries. At the outset overflamboyant gestures on the part of certain union officials helped this strategy win some initial success. However, the sober, constructive fashion in which the union leadership has handled the struggle with the companies in recent weeks has had its counter-effect. The political coalition has also withstood Red-baiting and racist attacks and innuendoes.

This is more than an election campaign—it is a battle of the people for their city, for its potential beauty, its culture, its well-being, its growth. It is the battle for continuing the spread of democracy which began roughly with the rise of the CIO. The scores of amateur politicians—people's politicians—trained in this campaign will know how to make any administration hew close to the line. In addition to their unions, the people have forged another weapon—political organization. Whatever the outcome on November 6, this is a tangible gain for democracy.

P.C. = PEOPLE'S COUNCILMAN

By JOSEPH FOSTER

His initials, P.C., stand not only for his name but for People's Councilman as well. A coincidence, you may say, but no happier accident has ever occurred. For Pete is a rare phenomenon in American life; he is regarded with equal affection by the most diverse types of citizens—the Negroes of the Bedford section (Brooklyn's Little Harlem), the Jews of Brownsville, the prosperous homeowners of Flatbush. Walk through any section of America's most publicized borough, from Sandy Hook to Coney Island, by the side of this squarely built Italian-American, and the "hyah Pete," that salutes him continuously from passers-by will give you a real insight into the meaning of that term "People's Councilman."

Since 1937 he has stood before the voters of Brooklyn as a councilmanic candidate. In 1941 he was the last of the nine Councilmen from Brooklyn to gain office. In 1943 his first-choice votes were the highest in the *entire city*. His gain in popularity was such that his political career can stand as a primer in people's movements.

How account for it? The Communist Party program explains it in part, of course, but it doesn't explain it entirely. His living translation of the program is a big part of the answer.

Consider his working day. sixteen hours of unrelenting pressure. In the last two years he has attended over 350 meetings, which means one every other day, counting Sunday and holidays. This figure does not include election

rallies or his Party meetings. He calls conferences on housing, child care, parent-teacher problems, interracial issues. He is part of the Local Improvement Board that passes on paving and sewage problems; he goes to his councilmanic sessions, travels to Albany on numerous hearings, writes a weekly column for the *Worker*, serves as head of the Kings County Communist Party, corresponds personally with some thirty servicemen, and sees a stream of people who come to his office for redress of one grievance or another.

These people insist on seeing Pete himself, even though any of his staff can handle routine complaints. But they get reassurance from the personal contact, and this attitude gives you an inkling as to the kind of man he is. The