

In Detroit CP Leader Debates Shachtman and Other Socialists

By JACK WILSON

Detroit, Dec. 16

Close to 800 persons attended a most unique and unprecedented debate held here last Monday night, Dec. 10, in which viewpoints ranging from Max Shachtman's independent socialism to Carl Winter's defense of Stalinism clashed.

The debate was a success in spite of a last-minute withdrawal from the event by Norman Thomas, who sent a letter indicating his refusal to appear on a platform with an apologist for the "Communist butchers" of Hungary. This action came as a result of strong pressure from Detroit right-wing socialist circles who argued that any appearance with a Stalinist would make them respectable and play into their hands.

How the Detroit press reacted to the debate, after playing up Thomas' refusal, was revealed on Tuesday, with a story in the *Detroit News*. The story was headlined "Socialists Lambaste Reds for Tyranny in Hungary."

The story read:

"Socialist leaders scolded a Communist spokesman here last night for attempting to 'whitewash' Russian aggression in Hungary.

"Carl Winter, chairman of the Communist Party of Michigan, tried unsuccessfully to woo an audience of 800 with his party's latest line—that the Hungarian revolt actually was 'Project X' masterminded by the U. S.'s Central Intelligence Agency headed by Allen Dulles."

In a word, the political weight of the meeting was against the Stalinist spokesman, and the distinction between socialist tendencies and the Stalinist line was clear and unmistakable.

The five speakers were, in order: A. J. Muste, the well-known pacifist spokesman; Max Shachtman, chairman of the Independent Socialist League; Carl Winter; Bert Cochran, editor of the *American Socialist*; and Sid Lens, socialist author and trade-unionist.

Since each speaker had only 20 minutes' time, the formal presentations were necessarily skimpy. Muste concentrated on how this meeting was held to find new answers on the road to peace, and to search for a ground for political realignment on the left.

DENOUNCE STALINISTS

Shachtman presented a summary of the Third Camp point of view, ranging from a blast at France and England at their Egyptian aggression to a scathing denunciation of Stalinism.

He pointed out that the road to peace lies in the support of the peoples who are rising up against all forms of imperialism, in all battles for democracy and socialism. In this connection, he challenged Winter to comment on the November 1917 Proclamation for Peace issued by the Soviet Congress, in which the new

Russian revolutionary power called for peace based on democracy, against all annexations, stressing above all withdrawal of all troops from all occupied countries and completely free elections in these countries. (Winter did not bite.)

Bert Cochran sought to place Stalinism in the historical perspective of what he called "the wedding of Marxism and oriental barbarism." Speaking after Winter, he told the CP leader "Don't try to hand us any whitewash of the greatest barbarism of our times!" Vigorously and unequivocally he condemned the Russian intervention in Hungary.

Lens emphasized the need for humanism and democracy in socialism. He showed the hypocrisy going on in both world camps, which use slogans like "peace" while they kill people and "progress" while they exploit people.

Winter came up with a demand for another Geneva meeting, the demand for withdrawal of foreign troops from all foreign soil—he obviously did not include Russian troops in Hungary in this category—and he did his best to slander the Hungarian revolution.

OLD TRICK

In the brief question period and summaries, the highlight turned out to be an exchange between a Stalinist in the audience and Shachtman, who had quoted from a sharp criticism of the Russian actions in Hungary. The Stalinist yelled out, "What Catholic paper are you reading from?" Shachtman was reading, of course, from the *Daily Worker*, as he readily pointed out to the audience.

As for Winter's apology that all was not clear in Hungary, Shachtman drove home the point that all Stalinist apologists are marked by one trait: In a second they leap to a firm position against imperialism in Egypt, in Asia or anywhere else in the world. They have a quick opinion about everything everywhere; but strangely they become confused, or not sure, or don't have enough facts at hand, when the situation involves Stalinist imperialism. "You can't get away with that trick any more," Shachtman told him.

The Rev. Henry Hitt Crane of the Central Methodist Church acted as moderator, and he did a good job. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Detroit Fellowship of Reconciliation chapter.

This was the largest political debate of this kind ever held in Detroit and it stimulated lively discussion before and afterwards in the labor movement here. As yet, there has been no account of it in the Stalinist press, but it may well appear this weekend in the Michigan edition of the *Worker*. Our own viewpoint is that for the Stalinists these kind of debates are disaster, and very hard for the remnants of the Stalinist movement to take.