

What DW's Clark Said in Columbia Debate

A debate between the foreign editor of the *Daily Worker*, and an associate editor of LABOR ACTION: the very idea that such a debate could be held would have sounded like a fantasy a few years ago. But such a debate was held, on February 27 before some 150 students at Columbia University under the auspices of the Eugene V. Debs Club.

Furthermore, the actual debate was far more fantastic than anything one could have imagined in the days when the constitution of the Young Communist League prohibited its members from talking to "Trotskyite fascists."

The subject was "The Crisis in Eastern Europe." The speakers: Joseph Clark of the "Daily Worker," and Gordon Haskell of LABOR ACTION. The tone was strictly within the conventions of polite debate (Clark insisted on referring to Haskell as "my colleague" throughout); the questions and discussion were voluminous.

In the course of the debate, and in answer to questions and remarks by his opponent and from the floor, Clark as-

serted the following:

The establishment of one-party regimes in Eastern Europe "set the clock back" there . . . He is opposed to a one-party regime, not only in these countries but in Russia also . . . In his opinion, the "Soviet forces had no right to intervene in Hungary." . . . He, for one, will continue to "fight for democracy" in Hungary in his paper and in his party. . . . Although he refused to use the term "imperialism" to describe Russia's action in Hungary, he described it as the imposition of the will of a great power on a small one by force, as the suppression of the national and democratic aspirations of the people of this small country, and the like. . . . He described the Russian intervention in Hungary as a "Stalinist-type" action, and attributed it to the fact that "vestiges" of Stalinism still exist in Russia and express themselves in Russian policy.

In fact, Clark went so much further in his discussion and condemnation of the non- or anti-democratic character of the Communist regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe than had any representatives of the Communist Party in other forums and debates held in New York recently, that students in the audience kept asking him why he calls himself a Communist instead of a social-democrat, and what his criticism of the social-

democrats might still be.

His reply was that he criticizes the social democrats for not establishing socialism in countries where they had come to power by parliamentary means. But he made no attempt to defend anything, except the nationalization of the means of production, in the countries where the Communists have come to power.

PREDICTIONS

Clark agreed with Haskell to such an extent on the latter's description and denunciation of the Communist regimes (except to deny that there is a ruling class in countries where they hold sway), that the issue of the debate was drawn not on the line of democratic socialism vs. communism, but rather on the "Hungarian Way" versus the "Polish Way" of overthrowing, or transforming, or democratizing Communist regimes. Clark stated that by following the "Gomulka way" Poland was on the road to democracy (although he is for much more of it than they have yet achieved), while in Hungary they have "nothing."

He predicted flatly that by the summer of 1958 there will be another "Geneva Conference" at which the United States and Russia will either reach agreement over the unification of Germany and the

joint guarantee of "security" in Europe, or will go far toward such an agreement.

He also predicted flatly that Poland and Russia will "continue to democratize" in the Gomulka fashion, and that there will be no more "Hungarys" in Eastern Europe.

Though both speakers agreed that the United States should not have intervened in Hungary with its armed forces, Clark described Haskell's assertion that socialists and especially the German Social Democrats should have encouraged the Poles and East Germans to support the Hungarian revolution with the purpose of spreading it to all the satellites and Russia itself as "immoral" and a policy which would have brought on World War III.

When asked why a man with his views still belongs to the Communist Party, and what he intends to do about his convictions, Clark stated that he intended to write and work for their adoption by the party.

Haskell asked him when, since the convention of the Communist Party at which a "compromise" on Hungary had been reached between the Gates and Foster factions, he had written an article attacking the Kadar regime and the Russian suppression of democracy in

(Continued on page 3)

DW's Clark at Col. — —

(Continued from page 1)

Hungary.

"I wrote such an article today," Clark replied, "and it will appear in the 'Daily Worker' on Friday."

Clark's article in the March 1 "Daily Worker" was actually on the Batista dictatorship in Cuba!

When questioned about the articles by George Morris in the DW which had whitewashed the Kadar regime's decree providing the death sentence for strikers, Clark asserted that they don't feel that all writers in their paper need agree on all questions, and that he does not agree with Morris' articles. (Neither he nor the editorial board of the paper has written a word showing disagreement with Morris on this article.)

In short, in the whole debate, Clark sounded not like an old-fashioned Stalinist, and not even like an official spokesman of the Gates tendency, but like a "Deutscherite" who is a little less consistent than the master.

That is, while Deutscher deplores the attempt of the Hungarian people to break out of the confines of Stalinism altogether (because such attempts interfere with the self-democratization of this regime by the bureaucracy itself), and then goes on to slander the Hungarian Revolution by echoing the Stalinist slander about the "reactionary danger" in the revolution, Clark said that the tragedy of the Hungarian Revolution is not that it was attempted, but that it was suppressed!

During the question and discussion period, the question was raised of the future of the Communist Party, and of the possibility of a socialist regroupment in America today. Clark made it clear

that he and his colleagues are little concerned with any possibility of a regroupment of the present "splinter groups" with or without the Communist Party. They look, rather, to some new development in or "out of" the mass of the labor movement which will make it possible for Communists to join with such elements in building a new "socialist" or "people's" movement in America.

Hackell pointed out that although the re-creation of a mass socialist movement depends on the rise of a new wave of radicalization in America, this does not mean that socialists can or should do nothing now to seek to lay the foundations of a broad, all-inclusive movement which would be able to take maximum advantage of a later shift in political sentiment of a mass character.

He stated that the Independent Socialist League has come out in favor of unity with the Socialist Party as a first step in the direction of socialist regroupment, and that they are now seeking to explore the possibility of such a unity on a healthy basis with a view to achieving it. He pointed out that, in the ISL's opinion, while a broad socialist movement in America should not require as a condition of membership the abandonment of the view that Russia is in some way "socialist," such a movement could not itself refer to Russia as "socialist" without forfeiting any possibility of gaining the adherence and support of large number of students and workers.

The debate was one of the most successful political meetings held at Columbia this year. The Debs Club plans to continue discussing the issues and points of view raised by the speakers at their next meeting.