

Sparks Fly as Shachtman Tilts with D.W. Editor

New York, Dec. 4

About 700, filling Community Church, were on hand last night as sparks flew in the unusual symposium on "Hungary and the Middle East" starring Max Shachtman, Independent Socialist chairman; John Gates, Daily Worker editor; Paul Sweezy, Monthly Review editor; and pacifists, John Swomley of F.O.R., and Dave Dellinger of Liberation; under the chairmanship of A. J. Muste.

It marked the first time in decades that a CP leader has been willing to meet Shachtman on the platform in political confrontation. The meeting was sponsored by the magazine Liberation.

All five speakers gave 10-minute presentations, followed by a period of roundtable cross-questioning among the panelists; then they answered questions sent up from the floor, and ended with five-minute summaries.

First speaker was Paul Sweezy, who limited himself to the Eastern European side of the topic. For "historical perspective" he ascribed the distortion of "socialism" in Russia to "the problem of building a socialist society in a very backward country . . . extremely isolated in its first two decades. . . . The results were very grave costs, some perhaps not worth paying for the results achieved."

One result was that "an enormous bureaucracy and police apparatus was built and became entrenched . . . became in effect the ruling power in the country."

In contradiction with this "bureaucratic police state" was the development of education, creation of a large working class, etc. This contradiction had to be resolved somehow. After Stalin's death, the CPSU leaders "had an inkling" and began to move slowly, but the Khrushchev revelations precipitated an "avalanche," for example Poznan.

Sweezy then contrasted the development in Poland to the Hungarian course. In Poland, he said, there has been a "genuine revolution . . . beautifully controlled. . . ." It was not clear, whether, in his opinion, a revolution had to be "beau-

tifully controlled" in order to receive his O.K. In any case, he went on to lament that the Hungarian development got "completely out of hand."

Referring to the Russian suppression, he said musingly: "I think, myself, that it would have been vastly preferable if it had been allowed to go to any end it was headed for; it probably would have been a very reactionary end, probably fascist. But if that's what the Hungarian people wanted after years of Soviet Communist rule, then they should be allowed to have it."

He thus combined acceptance of the

"fascist" calumny against the revolution with opposition to the suppression; but he went on to praise "the Polish example" again, and to call for "independent friendly criticism of things in East Europe."

John Swomley, Fellowship of Reconciliation national secretary, declared first of all that he was speaking for "Christianity and pacifism." He fired away particularly at "the futility of military alliances," ascribed the trouble in the Middle East to the Baghdad Pact, and stressed "the depolarization of power" that was taking place on both sides of the cold war.

Drawing his pacifist lessons from the Hungarian Revolution, he asserted that "much could have been saved if the people had chosen the non-violent form of resistance" and argued that "they turned to non-violence when they found they couldn't beat Russian tanks."

He aimed a salvo at "the Third Camp idea," which he identified entirely with the neutralist Nehru who has nothing in common with the Third Camp idea; took a shot at "the dogmas of extreme Marxism," singling out the slogan "Workers of the world, unite" as "obsolete"; and in conclusion urged that the U. S. disarm completely.

John Gates' presentation remained carefully within the bounds of the discipline and "legality" of the CP, where he is an

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Shachtman Tilts with D.W. Editor - -

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day. . . ." After again playing the record about Poland and Hungary, he wound up: "How do you determine the will of the Soviet people? I don't know. I hope they will evolve in a direction where there can be institutional devices. . . ."

Gates followed two tacks for his reply:

(1) Do elections really reflect will of the people here in the U. S. . . . "It's not so simple," he echoed.

(2) How is the will of the people shown in Russia? They expressed their will through the revolution . . . through defeating the interventionist armies . . . through industrializing the country . . . through developing its military strength . . . and so on in this vein. "Can the Russian people express themselves fully? No, they cannot." "The next great advance" will be to "build democratic institutions to correspond to their industrial base."

In the course of giving the above series of acts showing the "will of the people," Gates included: "when the CPSU through full discussion over a period of several years disagreed with Trotsky's policies, defeated him, and he was removed from power."

At this whopper, Shachtman interjected: "not only removed from power, but removed from the power to breathe!" Gates paused and replied: "That is a conjecture. Shachtman knows as much about that as I do, and he has no proof." Gates made no other reference to, let alone any attack on, Trotsky or Trotskyism or Trotskyists.

Chairman Muste then turned the floor back to Shachtman, who sewed up the point about democracy and Stalinism: You have an answer for Spain (referring to Sweezy's know-nothing pose), you have an answer for Egypt, for every

other country under dictatorship, where you advocate the overthrow of the dictator and the establishment of democratic institution—but not for the Stalinist dictatorships.

He concretized the evaded question: **In Russia do you favor the right to issue a publication condemning Foster's line, or Khrushchev's? the right to hold a meeting in Moscow where you could make the same speech you made here? . . . etc. You can't determine the "will of the people" where the people don't even have as much rights as in "this miserable bourgeois democracy of the U. S."**

THOSE FASCISTS AGAIN

As the chairman began presenting the panel with written questions from the floor, the first question, addressed to Sweezy, elicited another plain-Joe performance.

The question asked, "Has U. S. foreign policy been responsible for crimes and excesses of Stalinism . . .?" and obviously invited discussion of the relation between the two. Sweezy snapped the one word "Certainly" in ostentatious taciturnity, and sat back. This reporter began to suspect that he'd have been happier if he'd stood in bed.

A question challenged Shachtman on his "underestimation" of the "counter-revolutionary element in Hungary." The reply covered some of the material on that point that LA readers are familiar with, and the ISL chairman stressed: "Who makes the charge about 'fascists' in Hungary? The same people who said Tito was a fascist . . . the same people who said Hitler was their comrade when they signed the Hitler-Stalin pact. . . . We have a right to be skeptical."

Another question asked Sweezy to cite his evidence that Hungary might have

gone fascist, as he claimed to believe. In part Sweezy began to sound like W. Z. Foster: "Plenty of evidence . . . Mindszenty back in triumph. . . . The church was the only organized force [no mention of the Workers Councils!] . . ." but then he reverted to the Will Rogers pose: "I don't know . . . I just read the New York Times like Shachtman. . . ."

"Anyway," he wound up, very revealingly, "it was natural enough, considering Hungary's past of the fascist regime. Why wouldn't it go there [to fascism], especially since the Communist regime did such a lousy job on Hungary?"

There was the unspoken assumption that it was "natural," no less, for people who hated the Stalinist tyranny to accept a fascist tyranny to replace it because the Stalinists "did such a lousy job." It speaks volumes on Sweezy's notions about the masses of people.

The last question, addressed to Gates, was: "Would you favor free elections in Communist countries, including freedom for capitalist parties?" He gave a one-word answer: "Yes." [We propose to discuss this interesting reply further in our next issue.—Ed.]

In the brief summaries, Shachtman re-emphasized the view that the much-to-be-hoped-for socialist reconstitution in the U. S. must be based on a fully democratic conception of socialism.

Gates, in his summary, for the first time showed a bit of an old-fashioned snarling tone in referring to opponents of Communism who are not so much concerned for Hungary as intent on "destroying the Soviet Union, which is the program of imperialism."

Chairman Muste closed with some salutary remarks on the general discussion.

The only unanimous view was that it was a lively evening.