

# Stalinists Gained from Carnegie Hall Symposium

By GORDON HASKELL

New York, May 28

The American Stalinist movement, plunged into a first-rate crisis by the exposure of the nature of the Moscow regime at the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, made a small but no doubt appreciated gain in New York City last night. And the most regrettable aspect of it was that they did not really have to work for this small success, but were handed it on a silver platter, not by John Foster Dulles, their usual benefactor, but by the well-meaning pacifist and anti-Stalinist group, the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

The event which gave the Stalinist leaders a breather from the headlong retreat in which they have been engaged was a symposium on "America's Road to Democracy and World Peace" attended by close to 2000 people at Carnegie Hall. Held under the auspices of the F.O.R., the speakers were Eugene Dennis, general secretary of the Communist Party; W. E. B. DuBois, well-known Stalinist fellow-traveler; Norman Thomas; and A. J. Muste. Moderator was Roger N. Baldwin of American Civil Liberties Union fame.

The Stalinist success at this meeting was not at all the product of the relative brilliance of the Stalinist speakers; nor was it due to the fact that the audience was composed 75-80 per cent of their supporters. It resulted rather from the fact that the nature of this meeting gave them a chance to do exactly what they have been trying to do for the past several months: turn the attention of their own ranks and their sympathizing public away from the demoralizing consequences of the 20th Congress' revelations, and toward

F.O.R. is ready "at this time" to consider a united front with the Stalinists, his remarks were cast in a tone so mild and conditional that the Stalinists present can be excused for making the mistake of believing that it is only a matter of time and more blandishments before they have him and his co-thinkers in their united-front bag.

Since he felt himself constrained to stick to the announced subject of the evening, his attack was centered on the injustices and faults of American capitalism, while referring only in passing and in generalities to the equal or greater crimes of Stalinism.

Norman Thomas, on the other hand, brushed the direct topic of the evening aside with a general reference to his known positions on Jim Crow, disarmament and the like, and launched into a scatter-gun attack on Stalinism.

In addition to being diffuse, however, his effectiveness was reduced to a minimum by the fact that he dwelt not on the character of Russian "socialist" society, as "revealed" (to the Stalinists, at least) by the 20th Congress, but primarily on the perfidy of the Stalinists in various united fronts in the '20s and '30s, and on the standard social-democratic quotations from the works of Lenin and old Communist Party resolutions and manuals from the same period.

Such an approach might be calculated to re-inforce the convictions of his own adherents but they could not possibly affect the Stalinist ranks where they are hurting today. Quite the contrary.

Both Dennis and DuBois were able to put on an act of pained innocence which, in the circumstances, was quite effective. Dennis deplored the past mistakes, and the "violations of Soviet legality" in Russia, and offered the hand of unity and cooperation in the face of Thomas' attack.

## LA Distribution

Over a thousand copies of last week's LABOR ACTION, which concentrated material on the Communist Party crisis, were distributed Sunday night at the Carnegie Hall meeting here reported.

As a result, the N.Y. Times' news account, noting the distribution, singled out for mention our challenge to the CP to debate an Independent Socialist, "ignored by the Communists for three weeks."

On May 4 the New York ISL had sent a letter to the New York State organization of the CP, challenging them to "debate the respective views of our organizations." Nothing has been heard from the Stalinists.

## NOT DRIVEN HOME

Let us be clear on this: Thomas was highly critical of the Communist Party, especially its past. But he unwittingly did more to restore and preserve the shattered morale of CP members and their attachment to their party than any CP leader could have accomplished in the same time. The CP is desperately trying to give the illusion of authenticity to its current inner discussion, which is a fake and a fraud. This Thomas gave to them.

One speech is not enough, he repeated in answer to Dennis' protestations of democracy, you must prove your good faith. There is more rejoicing, he said, over one Communist sinner who returns to the camp of civil liberties than over a hundred civil-libertarians who have always remained true to democracy.

Followers of the CP who are beginning to suspect that it is totally bankrupt could only think: perhaps *this time* there is a genuine turn; perhaps this time there is a genuine discussion and a genuine attempt by our leaders to find the democratic way. But it is not true.

When the CP defended the Moscow Trials and Stalin's personal terror, they lied, they distorted, they framed up the truth. And now that they repudiate Stalin and talk of democracy, they lie and distort no less.

This lesson was not driven home at this "debate." Quite the contrary.

The whole program was arranged in such a way as to make it easy on the Stalinists. Questions from the floor had to be handed up in writing. Dennis did not read a single one that was handed him, but simply informed the audience that a number of them dealt with Russia and the revelations of the 20th Congress.

Roger Baldwin, the moderator, called on all participants to stick to the question, and in general displayed a marked warmth toward the Stalinist speakers which was absent in his treatment of their opponents.

Needless to say, Dennis made no reference to the questions asked him in the issue of LABOR ACTION which had been distributed to the audience at the door, despite a challenge from the floor to do so.

The intention of A. J. Muste and Norman Thomas who arranged this symposium was to hold a public discussion with Stalinist leaders in the interest of setting a civil-libertarian example of free public debate with Stalinists who are being persecuted by the American government. The publicity of the Fellowship of Reconciliation on the meeting

(Continued on page 3)

the "positive" program of a new Popular Front with socialists and anyone else who can be prevailed on to adopt the Stalinist program for "peace."

The wording of the topic, the fact that the meeting was arranged as a discussion or symposium rather than a debate, all played right into their hands. The efforts of Muste and Thomas to draw clear lines of distinction between themselves and the Stalinists, and to use the occasion to demonstrate the fact that a united front with them is not possible, were, in the circumstances, none too effective.

The line of both Stalinist speakers was exactly what could have been expected. While vaguely referring to unspecified "mistakes" of the past, or even admitting that they had been wrong in not supporting the Kutcher case, they simply denounced capitalism and beat their breasts for peace. Both of them referred repeatedly to the "one third of the world which is socialist" and the necessity of getting along with it whether one likes "socialism" or not. Though their speeches were larded with the usual Stalinist half-truths, lies and distortions, they were presented in a tone of reasonable, conciliatory, almost apologetic humility.

## STALINISTS DEMAGOGIC

All they want, they pleaded, is to work as humble toilers in the vineyard of the struggle for racial equality, civil liberties and peace. And isn't it clear, friends, that we will be more effective if we work together than if we waste our time on mutual recriminations about regrettable misunderstandings or even mistakes of the past . . . ?

A. J. Muste, speaking for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, centered his remarks on a general anti-militarist, libertarian, pacifist position. Although he made it clear that neither he nor the

# Stalinists Gained —

(Continued from page 2)

dwelt heavily on the theme of giving the persecuted Stalinists a platform from which to express their views.

LABOR ACTION, of course, is uncompromisingly for full democratic rights for the Stalinists. But fighting for their democratic rights should not be confused with giving them a hand-up with their propaganda.

There may be those whose passion for civil liberties was strengthened by this event. But its major *political* effect was to give the Stalinist leaders a chance to bolster their shaken following with the feeling that even if they are going through their own blackest ideological hour, there is more which unites them with respected and respectable currents of democratic opinion in this country than that which divides them; and that those who insist on criticizing the "negative" aspects of Stalinism are dwelling in the past rather than in the present or future.

Needless to say, the alleged eagerness of the Stalinist leaders for a public confrontation of different opinions has not yet led them to accept the Independent Socialist League's challenge to a debate on the meaning of the 20th Congress.

39135 1 328 W 411