

## At the John Gates-Thomas-Wolfe Debate

By SAM TAYLOR

The reaction to the banning of John Gates, editor of the *Daily Worker*, from speaking at the New York City Colleges indicates the change in political atmosphere since the high-tide mark of McCarthyism.

One point of interest is that while Gates was prevented from speaking before the Marxist Discussion Club at Queens College, Stalinist or Stalinoid organizations have subsequently played little or no role in the ensuing protests.

This time instead of a few unavailing protests, there was virtually a scramble among anti-Stalinist groups at a number of different colleges to sponsor meetings with John Gates. The New York Civil Liberties Union jumped into the middle of the situation and sponsored a meeting at a New York hotel which had to be cancelled at the last minute because of the pressure of veteran and Catholic organizations in getting the hotel to cancel the reservation.

At Columbia University meetings were sponsored by SLID and the Debs Society on successive days, and about 1200 students attended. These two meetings probably constituted the largest turnout at any college meeting in recent years. The attendance at these meetings represented a tremendous rebuff to the undemocratic and arbitrary rules of the city college administrations.

Even those who are unprepared to take consistent civil-libertarian positions would not swallow the transparent justifications for the ban which were offered up. Others, no doubt, proceeded from the motivation that since the Communist Party was so weak and ineffectual, it was ridiculous to ban Gates from speaking.

### PUSHING GATES

At the meetings, the questioning of Gates was sharp and sometimes hostile. A number of questions were put to him in response to his claim that Communists have changed or that he, Gates, has changed in the direction of taking more democratic positions. These questions took him up on this claim and tried to push him further—but only with varying success.

The response to and at these meetings was in a sense a response to the fight of the Gates faction in the CP. No matter what point of view many hold on what is happening in the CP, in practice there is the recognition that there is a difference between the Gates and Foster groups. Few have any illusion that Gates

or his faction has suddenly blossomed out as democrats, but there is the awareness on the part of almost all those who have any real understanding of the situation in the CP that this group has taken the first steps in this direction.

If the speaker were William Z. Foster or some other old-line Stalinist there is considerable doubt whether the protests would have been so widespread.

Gates' faction has tried to use these meetings to prove that his approach—a more independent and democratic posture—is the way for the CP to break out of its present isolation. At one time or another during these two days almost every staff member of the *Daily Worker* was up at Columbia. They even did the Jimmy Higgins work of selling the paper. In the past there would have been LYLers for this.

Gates repeatedly argued at the meetings that Communists have a legitimate place in America's political life as one of the progressive and democratic groups. And in the CP he will undoubtedly argue that his way is the way to do it.

But the tone and type of most of the questioning added an important proviso: *You have to break with your support and defense of that totalitarian system, Stalinism, which you defend as "socialist"; we don't believe your protestations that you will preserve democratic rights if you come to power in the future as long as you defend a system which denies all democratic rights in the present.*

### FIREWORKS AT COLUMBIA

The meeting sponsored by the John Dewey Society (SLID) of Columbia drew about 750 in a debate on the Communist Party. Speaking with John Gates were Norman Thomas, Socialist Party leader, who has loudly protested the action of the city college administrations, and Bertram Wolfe, author of *Three Who Made A Revolution* and political advisor to the State Department, who failed to make a single reference to the academic-freedom issue.

Norman Thomas made the initial presentation. Before proceeding to a series of questions to Gates, Thomas criticized the banning of Gates, stated that he was an opponent of the Smith Act, under which Gates was sent to jail, and that he recognized that there is progress in the CP, or rather in the Gates faction, toward democracy.

The following are Thomas' questions and Gates' answers given in rebuttal or in response to prodding from students.

Thomas: "Has the CP Manual of 1935, written by J. Peters, been dropped or drastically revised? If so, when and how?"

GATES: J. Peter's Manual was dropped in 1936. The recent convention changed concepts toward democratizing the CP. For example, the right of dissent is now guaranteed. "This may not seem revolutionary to others, but in the CP it is."

THOMAS: "Does any faction of the CP still insist that the Soviet Union is the only fatherland of workers all over the world?"

GATES: The CP says that American workers have no allegiance to any other country. However, this does not negate "internationalism."

### Q. AND A.

THOMAS: The American Veterans Committee and the Workers Defense League are preparing a petition calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungary. Would Gates sign it?

GATES: I will sign any petition for mutual and simultaneous withdrawal of all troops all over the world. I was opposed to Russian intervention and it should not have been done. The solution should have been left up to the Hungarian people. However, there were forces in the West who tried to push the situation too far—toward violence and terror.

THOMAS: "Do you accept Moscow's latest claim that now and always it has stood for all European economic cooperation?"

GATES: The Soviet Union always stood for mutual trade. However, in the 1920s the Soviet Union did not have a clear position; but it is for it now. In respect to the Marshall Plan, the Soviet Union refused on the grounds of political strings, and the U. S. was really glad that it did not participate. But the Soviet Union should have been more flexible.

THOMAS: "Is your faction of the party unreservedly committed to (a) rejection of any sort of dictatorship; (b) a multi-party system and (c) support of the Bill of Rights, if you should achieve power?"

GATES: After quoting from the recent CP convention about preservation of freedom once CP comes to power: a multi-party system, however, is the result of political development. In U. S. you have this development, in Russia you do not. I do not believe that the best way to get advances in the Soviet Union is through a multi-party system. Differences of opinion in the Soviet Union should be expressed, and I hope that various means will be found for their expression.

THOMAS: Have all factions of your party repudiated the Black Belt theory for Negro self-determination? I ask this question because I have been attacked in the CP press as a supporter of lynch law because I rejected this theory.

GATES: (No answer.)

THOMAS: "Are your proposals for united fronts or joint action still based on your 1935 assertion that 'if Socialists agree to act with us so much the better, even though we may be sure that at some stage of the action they will betray the workers?'" (Peter's Manual.)

GATES: (No answer.)

Thomas' speech was interesting because he constantly made a distinction between the Gates faction and the CP as a whole, stated that he believes people can change for all kinds of reasons and that these changes have significance. But at the same time, he finds it difficult to believe in the conversion since it came only after Stalin died and after the Khrushchev revelations.

On this point of what is happening in the CP, Thomas openly took issue with Bertram Wolfe, who spoke as if nothing has happened and charged that the recent CP convention acted on orders from Duclos just as it had back in 1945 when Browder was ousted.

Thomas ended his speech with an affirmation of the relationship of socialism and democracy: there is no "imperfect" or "harsh" socialism in Russia, but state capitalism. Socialism is not another name for collectivization. Without democracy there can be, under collectivization, the most ruthless dictatorship.

Gates' speech was an outline of how the CP has changed: more democratic, less monolithic, and independent in making its own decisions. "We are changing," he said, "and America should change its attitude toward us."

With one eye on the fight inside the CP, he presented a defense of the CP and the "U. S. road to socialism"; the CP has a future because it stands for "socialism"—which he then defined as merely "public ownership of property under the leadership of the workers." In all it was essentially a restatement of the convention resolution.

### ISSUES DRAWN

Bertram Wolfe's speech was a standard version of the "nothing has changed" school. The recent CP convention got its orders on the proper amount of freedom from the Soviet Union and on how to get closer to the American people. Once again, Duclos, the French CP leader, was the relay station for these orders. And then he read off a Tass dispatch to show that Moscow approved of the way the convention went. Wolfe could well have written the statement that J. Edgar Hoover issued on the convention.

In rebuttal Norman Thomas pointedly remarked that he disagreed with Wolfe on the possibility of Communists changing, although he stated that he does not intend to be fooled by their zigs and zags. Wolfe, on the spot, stated that he hopes that "Gates will be a free man again and I know where Mr. Gates tends."

Another point of significance, at which Thomas and Wolfe parted company, arose in respect to the withdrawal of troops from Hungary, and to Gates' counterposing of withdrawal of all troops from Europe. Wolfe replied that he was opposed to the withdrawal of NATO troops (that is, U. S. troops) because all of Western Europe would be at the mercy of Russia.

Once again Thomas took issue. The events in Poland and Hungary demonstrate that the satellites are a weight around Russia's neck rather than a help; if Russia decided to attack, her troops would have to move through the hostile territory of East Europe. Therefore, he stated, withdrawal of NATO troops can't be ruled out, although there have to be safeguards in the withdrawal plans.

### YSL FUND DRIVE

## YSL Launches Fund Drive

By MAX MARTIN

The Young Socialist League's 1957 Fund Drive opens on April 1, with the League aiming this year to raise \$1650 during the three-month drive period ending on July 1. The separate quotas for YSL units and groups are as follows:

At Large and National Office	\$ 125
Berkeley	100
Chicago	300
Dayton Area	50
Los Angeles	200
New York	750
Pittsburgh	125
TOTAL	\$1650

Although a few contributions have already been received in advance of the opening of the drive, it is too early to report them. The first results of this year's YSL financial drive will appear in an early issue of *Challenge*.

The prospects for this Fund Drive are

quite good. Last year the YSL drive scored an outstanding success, oversubscribing the national quota by 18 per cent. In view of the new stirring in the socialist movement and the new possibilities which are opening up for it, there is good reason to believe that we can do as well, and perhaps even better, this year.

Along with the new possibilities for the socialist movement go new needs, or rather more intense forms of old ones. And primary among these is the need for increased financial support from all of our members and sympathizers. The quotas of the various branches are based on realistic estimates of what it is possible to achieve, and therefore we have every hope that our goal shall be reached.

Readers of *Challenge* can also do their bit. Make your checks or money orders payable to Max Martin and send them to 114 West 14 Street, New York City.

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