

ECHO OF THE REVOLUTION

Budapest to Mahoning Valley: CP Leader Steuben Breaks

By JACK WILSON

The American Communist party suffered another major defection with the announcement of John Steuben that he had broken with Stalinism. In an interview with A. H. Raskin, labor editor of the *New York Times*, Steuben gave cogent reasons for breaking with his past—35 years of completely devoted activity to the policies of the Communist Party.

Here was a man who was able to say that while he thought he was spending his life building for socialism, he was in reality destroying its chances of success. This is the implication of Steuben's statement. It is a terrible thought to have to live with; and Raskin's description of Steuben, who is critical ill, combines a picture of physical and moral suffering.

The straw that broke the camel's back, in this instance, was the decree of the Kadar puppet regime to execute strikers. Steuben said that any government that decreed death for strikers was morally bankrupt. It is not accidental that this was the breaking point for Steuben.

For Steuben remembered his early CIO days as a union organizer, a strike leader, and as the Communist *par excellence* in the Youngstown-Canton-Massillon steel area. He went through many steel workers' struggles: the violent defeat in 1935 in Canton; the Little Steel strike disaster in 1937.

HOME TO ROOST

How could any thinking individual of those days ever forget how the National Guard marched into the Mahoning Valley steel area, and broke the strike under orders of Governor Martin L. Davey?

Steuben knows from his own experiences what the steel workers of Budapest are

about. He knows what the Memorial Day massacre of Chicago meant in 1937. And now? To have worse, and in the name of "socialism?"

There is another interesting observation in Steuben's statement: "If the Soviet Union had been fortunate enough to have a Constitution which included a Fifth Amendment, many, many thousands of lives would have been saved."

Here the Moscow Trials have come home to roost. Steuben was an arrogant Stalinist in those days. He was a "fighter against fascism" in the days of the Spanish revolution. He sneered scornfully at the hair-splitters who questioned the "socialism" of Russia. They were counter-revolutionaries, at least in theory, these "enemies of the people" who were in the steel workers' union or active elsewhere in Ohio. For Steuben, the Moscow Trials proved they were class enemies and had to be run out of the unions. As a steel union organizer, he did his part to help purge "Trotskyist" elements, with a clear conscience, no doubt. Of course, later he was bounced by Phil Murray, too, but that is another story.

And now he knows. The Moscow Trials were frame-ups. And the people that he had his cohorts hounded, framed and persecuted in the American labor were right and he was wrong.

Unlike so many thousands of disillusioned radicals, who see in their own failure the failure of the world, Steuben hasn't given up the idea that a fight for socialism is worth-while as well as necessary. He urges his colleagues to "repudiate everything that smacks of Stalinism and chart a course on the basis of the true interests of the American workers and the American people as a whole."