

Socialist, Communist Debate Hungary's Fight at CCNY

By R. D.

New York, Dec. 15

For the first time in many years, students at City College had the opportunity of hearing the ideas of democratic socialism and those of the Communist Party and its supporters on the same platform.

On December 13 over 50 students heard Gordon Haskell, associate editor of *LABOR ACTION*; Seymour Gerson, a leader of the New York State Communist Party; and William Mandel, author and contributor to such magazines as the *American Socialist*, currently teaching courses at the Jefferson School. They discussed the recent events in Hungary and Poland.

Gerson, tracing the history of "the tragedy in Hungary," discussed the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU and the processes of "democratization, liberalization," etc. which were supposedly set in motion at that time. The events of Poland and Hungary were caused by resistance to this policy, resistance which the Polish CP finally overcame.

Supporting the first uprising of the Hungarian workers (which on October 24 the Russian troops met with bullets) as a democratic upsurge of the masses and not fascist, Gerson stated that this was the "considered and collective judgment of the Communist Party."

Speaking of the November 4 massacre, however, he somehow shifted the ground to talk of the "damaged prestige of the USSR" and quoted from an interview in the *Reporter* with Bela Kovacs, a leader of the Hungarian Smallholders Party, referring to the possibility that there

might be some elements of white terror.

Of course Gerson failed to mention (as did the *Daily Worker* in its report of the interview) the context in which this appeared, namely a statement by Kovacs that this was a democratic revolution, that nobody wants the old regime reinstated, and that "had there been any attempt to put them in power, all Hungary would have instantly risen."

Gerson's solution would have been to seal the borders of Hungary to prevent the alleged influx of fascists, arm the workers, form joint patrols in the streets and then have the government negotiate with the armed workers. (The same workers who rose up against the government?)

Gordon Haskell pointed to the fact that the present Kadar regime in Hungary can rally no popular support in the entire country, and to the efforts by some to "smear the Hungarian revolution with the brush of fascism" despite the fact that the regime has not been able to produce any fascists for public display. Haskell posed the question of who was leading the revolution as the key to the entire situation.

Exposing the whole "fascist" argument and referring to Joseph Clark's article in the *Daily Worker* in which he practically admits how the whole fairy tale was concocted, Haskell went on to describe the Revolutionary Workers Councils as the organs of the revolution and as virtually identical with the soviets of 1917 in Russia.

Hitting at Gerson's implication that any opposition to Russia put one in the camp of American imperialism, Haskell spelled out his own socialist criticism of the Communist regimes. We can get together and denounce the U. S. State Department and capitalism in general anytime, he said, but that doesn't mean we must apologize for the brutalities of Stalinism as exemplified in this massacre of Hungarian workers.

"UNDERSTANDING"

Mandel dealt mainly with Poland, declaring that there were sweeping changes in the direction of democracy while retaining the "socialistic" framework of the economy. In dealing with Hungary, however, Mandel—while not defending the Russian slaughter—dealt with it primarily in the context of "understanding" how the Russians felt about the Hungarians who fought so bitterly against them during the war. And since the Hungarian workers did not rise up against fascism but fought and died for it, according to Mandel, this presumably cast some doubts on the genuine democratic nature of the revolution or at least on the ability of the Hungarians to create any democratic institutions.

In this regard, both Gerson and Mandel emphasized how much they could "appreciate" and "understand" the Russian hostility to the Hungarians, particularly in view of capitalist encirclement with American bomber bases.

Haskell pointed out that the Russians weren't attacking these bomber bases, however. They were shooting down Hungarian workers in the streets, for wanting to publish their own newspaper.

While sociological and psychological reasons were interesting, he explained, "understanding" them can nevertheless be accompanied with the most intense hostility to their political implications. Too often such arguments are used as apologies for reactionary political events.

He suggested that a Marxist class analysis of the Stalinist system would be far more fruitful for an understanding of these momentous events in Eastern Europe.

'haw' in Sight

of socialist student group at that school. Although this university has a reputation for being "uninterested in politics," there is a good chance that YSLers in cooperation with other socialists will soon be able to organize some kind of group.

The YSL unity which existed at Oberlin College two years ago ceased to exist when its members graduated and moved to other areas. As a result I went to Oberlin with no idea of the campus situation. Only two weeks earlier, however, 1000 students had traveled to Cleveland to participate in a demonstration on behalf of the Hungarian Revolution; so it was not surprising to find that the campus also has a loose discussion group which was engaged in studying books and pamphlets about socialism and Marxism. Its program chairman extended an invitation to the YSL to send any future speakers on tour to address it, in the same way that other socialist organizations have been invited in the past. Thus an interest in the ideas and program of socialism still remains very much alive at Oberlin.

At the end of this tour, I was left with the feeling of the vigor, political level and morale of almost every member and unit of the YSL visited. Even where there are only a few members, they work with the greatest determination and under difficult circumstances.

Another impression I received was of the unique position of the YSL. In most places it is the only socialist group on campus. Nowhere was there any sizable group of Stalinist members or sympathizers. Other socialists whom I met were almost entirely in favor of the need to make a new start.