

Carnegie Hall Debate

By William Bundy

NEW YORK, May 28 — Carnegie Hall reverberated with some peculiar harmony as a group of notables unused to sharing the same stage performed before an audience of 2500 last night. The occasion was a debate between Norman Thomas, Socialist Party leader, Eugene Dennis, general secretary of the Communist Party, W. E. B. DuBois, famous Negro historian, and A. J. Muste, pacifist leader. The subject was "America's Road to Peace and Democracy."

The affair, sponsored by Muste's Fellowship of Reconciliation was advertised as a good old-fashioned free speech jam session with diverse and original talents participating. It turned out, however, to be an attempt at a romantic duet,

with Dennis as the ardent crooner and Thomas as the reluctant object of his affections. DuBois accompanied Dennis with some well executed background while Muste seemed a little out of place with a recital all his own.

All four of the speakers gave America's capitalist rulers some free advice. Continuing war preparations, failure to insure civil rights and liberties to all Americans are alienating world public opinion, they said. All implied that a different set of "good" capitalist rulers might follow different policies. None made the point that the policies of the present government on those issues are strictly bi-partisan and far from being the result of short sightedness or stupidity, are carefully calculated in the interests of capitalist class rule.

The dissonance was provided by Thomas who made the body of his presentation an attack on the crimes of Stalinism. However, he said, these are the logical outcome of Leninism, "although Lenin's writings show that he didn't expect it to come out that way." Thomas did not mention the fact that Lenin wrote at length on the danger of bureaucracy or that he spent the last year of his life in a fight against Stalinism. Nor did he point out that the major crime of Stalinism consists precisely in the physical destruction of Lenin's party.

Thomas called for the Soviet Union to rehabilitate social democrats and release political prisoners. He mentioned Trotsky in passing, but said nothing about the frame-up of the leaders of the Russian Revolution and the Moscow Trials.

He held fast to the State Department pro-imperialist position on China saying that Communist China should be considered for UN membership only after it recognizes the puppet governments of Chiang Kai-shek and Syngman Rhee.

A. J. Muste presented the pacifist position of opposition to all wars and all violence. He corrected Thomas who had said: "When World War II began, I like all Americans supported it." Muste pointed out that members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation had opposed it as they oppose all wars. He failed to mention that the Socialist Workers Party had also opposed the war, not for pacifist reasons, but in the Leninist tradition of revolutionary opposition to all capitalist wars fought for imperialist aims.

Muste dodged the question of Stalinism in the Soviet Union in his presentation and echoed Thomas, with some reservations,

in further remarks. He replied to Dennis' appeal for peaceful co-existence by saying "it must include the concept of social change."

The 88 year old DuBois impressed the audience with a 20 minute survey of the history of the human race from primitive communism to a projection into America's socialist future. He touched upon subjects controversial among socialists only in passing, referring to China and the USSR as "socialist states," and dodging the issue of Stalinism with the broad historical generalization that the backwardness and isolation of the Soviet Union gave rise to "difficulties."

In the rebuttal, DuBois came to Dennis' rescue by saying that the questions about the Soviet Union and Stalinism had nothing to do with the subject: "America's Road to Peace and Democracy." This was in direct contradiction to his own presentation which had reviewed the march of revolution across the world, and correctly characterized the Russian Revolution as the point of departure for all present political tendencies. He was simply dodging to avoid taking a position on the crisis of Stalinism.

Eugene Dennis said that the Communist Party considers socialism to be the "final solution" for America, but at the present time, a policy of "peaceful competition and peaceful co-existence with the other nations is the only road to progress for America."

In answer to Muste, he admitted that social change, "for example colonial freedom," should be allowed to take place within the framework of peaceful co-existence.

The fact that the maintenance of colonial rule is a life or death question for capitalists as a class, and that their price for even a temporary end of the cold war is a sell-out of the colonial revolutions was not mentioned by Dennis. He was not entirely inconsistent, however, since in reply to Thomas, he said that Lenin's views on imperialism are now "obsolete."

He stated flatly that socialism can come to America through peaceful means, not mentioning that the capitalists would probably oppose such change by force.

In complying with Thomas' demand to repudiate the revolutionary writings of Lenin and of one of Foster's early works, Dennis called the Foster book "ancient and outmoded." The question arises in view of the "death of the Stalin cult," what book by Foster, Dennis, or any other Stalinist, isn't?

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stances that time and change may make obsolete."

His declaration of principle was buttressed by a policy statement adopted by the Policy Committee of the International Executive Board. "It has been the established policy of the UAW-CIO," read the statement, "that long term agreements are possible and practical only to the extent that both management and labor consider such agreements as living documents. Such living documents must not, during their lifetime, foreclose the working out of such practical problems that may arise which the parties could not anticipate at the time such agreements were negotiated.

"Any approach," continues the policy statement, "which regards the contract as a legalistic, static document, and which fails to deal with practical problems when they develop, makes long-term agreements unworkable, impractical, impossible, and unacceptable."

NOW IS THE TIME!

The above stated principle was adopted two years before the expiration of the 5-year agreement signed in 1950. Reuther reported that General Motors had accepted the "living documents" principle and the agreement was amended. Presumably, on the basis of this principle, Reuther again signed the present long-term 3-year agreement. If words mean anything, the time has now arrived to invoke the principle of the "living document" as the first step in winning the too-long delayed demand for a 30-hour week at 40 hours pay.