

Thomas Tells Students Why CP Parley Worried Hoover

By LESTER RODNEY

THE VISITOR to Queens College to hear Norman Thomas wind up Academic Freedom Week received, as he entered Remsen Hall, a student program for the week which still included the name of John Gates as a featured guest. The Daily Worker editor had not spoken, but a lot more students at Queens were talking about him than if Provost Garvey had not decided to bar him, and considerably more students of the city colleges are going to hear him this week than the 350 who might have crowded into the Queens lecture hall.

Starting about ten minutes before 3 p.m. this balmy Thursday afternoon, the boys and girls, school books under arms and a few wearing shorts to salute the two day spring, quickly filled the 200 seats in the modern down-sloping lecture hall and began sitting cheerfully on steps and standing five deep in the rear. If one thing was clear about their feelings, it was a deep resentment against being treated as children to be protected from controversial thoughts. On Wednesday, one of the two student publications, the Rampart, in an editorial entitled "Theory and Practice" to feature the irony of undemocratic suppression in a week celebrating academic freedom, cheered the college Cabinet's vote to "assure that an atmosphere of free inquiry and discussion prevail on the campus," called for students to take their stand unafraid of outside pressures and concluded "if the battle for freedom of thought is lost on our country's campuses how can it be won anywhere?"

The other student paper, the Crown, cut deep in its editorial on the decision of the five city college heads to back up Garvey and bar Smith Act victims from the campuses. It said "There is something basically wrong with a system which can so summarily exclude an important minority point of view, so summarily exclude an important minority point of view, which can, through one man's politically provoked personal opinion, negate the whole concept of student government and the larger ideal of the democratic process." It called for future city college presidents to be "chosen on an educational rather than a political basis by the faculty of the college" and added that a student-faculty committee should be "allowed to provide a check on presidential powers."

THIS WAS the setting of fer-



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ment, protest and curiosity as Thomas, veteran anti-Communist leader of the Socialist Party, opened his talk with an eloquent attack on the barring of Gates.

He went on to establish his own anti-Communist Party position beyond doubt, saying that in spite of "changes for the better" in the CP, he opposed socialist-communist unity in the fight for socialism "until the Communists reject Leninism, which contains the seeds of Stalinism" and saying, as if this were not a good thing, that the Communists would gain more by the undemocratic ban than if Gates had spoken at Queens. "This," he interjected quickly with a smile, "is no insult to Mr. Gates, just a general proposition."

Thomas admitted he was "not without prejudices and memories" in his feelings toward the CP, claiming that when he attacked a theory of a separate Negro republic in the south, he was denounced in the Daily Worker as "an advocate of lynching." He said his right to run for president once was denied by the Communists "because I was not sufficiently loyal to Stalin," and that the Peoples World had called for the preventing of a meeting of his in California. "I remember too their cheers for the prosecution of the Trotskyists under the Smith Act," he said.

Nevertheless, he said vigorously, J. Edgar Hoover was way out of line and had "no business" telling Congress that the recent Communist convention registered no change and was a fraud. "How does he know?" he asked, "Where is his evidence?"

Thomas said it was clear to him there was a "different quality" to what the CP was saying these days. "Are we to condemn people never to change their minds because under no circum-

stances their change would be believed?" he asked rhetorically. He pointed out that there was no concealment at the convention, that non-Communist observers were invited, and whatever else their impression differed on all agreed that nobody at the convention "put loyalty to Russia ahead of loyalty to the U.S."

There are some people in this land, he went on, who have "a vested interest in no change. Hoover is one of them."

HE BROUGHT roars of delighted laughter by reading a clipping from the N. Y. Times about the un-American Committee hearings, in which Rep. Sherer, after hearing stoolpigeon Laitner estimate there were about 18,000 CP members, bemoaned the fact that there were "only" 6,000 FBI agents "combating subversion part time, to three times as many subversives."

"If this means anything," said Thomas sardonically, "it argues that by right there should always be as many secret service men as Communists! What became of the wonders of the FBI?" he asked to gales of laughter, "I thought one FBI man could put a regiment to rout?"

Returning to the question of Gates, he said if he were a student he would ask "politely, I hope" such questions as how far you could go for freedom and still be a communist. "This is the place for Gates to answer such questions," he said, "Not the kind of committee which summoned him to Foley Square!"

We are "failing to be loyal to our great traditions when we don't fight for freedom, he said. "There is this serious matter of damning by name. Since it happened that Communists were for their own freedom and also appeared generally as advocates of other freedoms, it became too easy to say that those who want freedom are communists." There was a rustle of appreciation for this simple picture of the real aims of McCarthyite red-baiting. "When for example," the long, lean socialist continued with waving arms, "A bloody dictator of the right like Trujillo is questioned he just shouts 'Communist, Communist!'"

It was time, he said, "for common sense and a sense of humor." He pointed out what many of the students did not seem to know, that the Smith Act jailings involved no overt acts. He said students must participate in the problems of life, that freedom from taking part in life (Continued on Page 7)

Thomas

(Continued from Page 4)

is not real freedom, that one who detaches himself from the issues of the world is "only half a person."

Freedom in this H-Bomb era must include the ending of war, he observed. The students broke into very laughter and applause when he said "You know what happened to the flying saucers? They came from a highly developed planet and as they neared the earth and got a look at the madness going on and on in a race to destruction while there aren't enough schools and hospitals, they said Home James!"

Pushing aside his nose and waving his finger he concluded, "That freedom can not be maintained by the kind of nonsense that keeps John Gates from sneaking here!" The ovation continued for several minutes, forcing him to stand and bow.

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THEN THE QUESTIONS poured forth in a stream. Asked if he felt the U.S. should disarm, Thomas says yes, but not unilaterally now. His quarrel with U.S. policy on armament he said, was its failure to push through UN an "immediate moratorium on the testing of these monstrous bombs, something most governments appear willing to agree on." He said this agreement would curtail the further development of "super weapons" and lead toward real disarmament.

"Do you believe the Communist Party poses no clear and present danger?" was a question.

"Yes, I believe that," was the prompt reply. "Repression of the Communist Party offers much greater danger, in addition to weakening our position in the world, and hindering our ability to criticize bad things elsewhere in the world."

Another student pointed out that Dr. Buell Gallagher of CCNY had said Communists could speak on the campuses, the ban was just aimed at those convicted under the Smith Act. "Do you feel that position is wrong?"

Thomas began by saying he didn't want to quarrel with individuals, that Gallagher was his friend, then said bluntly "It's a quibble. There is no difference between Communists and Communists convicted under the Smith Act except they were prosecuted by that bad act. Right now the Supreme Court is considering the cases of Lightfoot and Scales which makes mere membership a crime. What happens to Dr. Gallagher's argument then? No, I'm afraid the presidents were desperately looking for an out which would not make them look TOO bad and wouldn't impair their next appropriations from the city."

A question which provoked a lot of attention was the plaintive "Mr. Thomas, why isn't it possible to build a good radical party in this country?" The answer centered on the difficulties posed by the two party system.

Finally—"Mr. Thomas, is it possible to learn about Communism from anyone but a Communist?"

Thomas said of course it was, in his opinion. "But one certainly ought to be able to HEAR what the Communists have to say themselves, for the proper balance on the subject."

And so, it was becoming clearer and clearer, thought 99 percent of the student body of our city's colleges.