

# What HAS the CP Done, The Students Asked Gates...

THE HISTORIC contributions of the American Communist Party and of individual Communists were vigorously defended by John Gates last week as part of his give and take with forum opponents and students at Columbia University.

Candidly admitting many mistakes now clearly seen, the Daily Worker editor who had been invited in order to uphold the academic freedom denied by the city college presidents' ban, won applause when he said spiritedly: "The fact that we made these mistakes does not mean everything we did was mistaken, far from it. We did a lot of good and made vital contributions which history bears out. We did a great deal for America. Sure, we made mistakes, So do the other parties. I only wish they were as critical of their past mistakes as we are of ours!"

The theme came up first via a question of one of the 800 students at Columbia's McMillan Theatre in the forum sponsored by the John Dewey Society. "Mr. Gates", was the challenge, "You mentioned before that the Communists had made contributions to America. What contributions are you talking about? Could you name three?"

Gates stepped to the microphone, while behind him on the platform the angular Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas, and the sharp faced anti-Soviet writer Bertram Wolfe watched.

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"CERTAINLY", he said, "One

is the fight for unemployment insurance. . . ." which brought a snicker of disbelief from two or three students. "It is recognized", Gates went on, "that Communists played a vital role in this fight. I myself went to jail in the course of that fight."

Secondly, he related, was the Communist Party's part in the fight for Negro rights. The mistaken ideological concepts of the self determination — in the Black Belt, which Thomas had challenged him on, Gates said, were not helpful to this fight, but "are far outweighed by the contributions, in many respects pioneering, which can be documented from the Scottsboro case on".

As the third part of the answer he cited the role of Communists in building industrial unionism, another tremendous fight against entrenched interests in which he saw the inside of a prison cell, for his part in organizing the steel union in Youngstown, Ohio.

The theme recurred the next day before a turnaway audience of 350 in the smaller Harkness Theatre secured by Columbia's Eugene V. Debs Society. Prexy Buell Gallagher of CCNY, Gates said, had accused him of being an admitted "liar" in the past.

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"I DID tell a lie", the 43-year-old editor said, "And I want to tell you what it was. I have used force and violence twice in my life. Once was in behalf of the Loyalists in Spain, fighting for the

legally elected democratic republic against Hitler and Mussolini, the second time against the Nazis in Germany in World War Two. The lie came in 1937 when in getting my passport I answered no to the question of whether I was going to Spain, since if I had said yes I would not have been permitted to go.

"I believe firmly that if more Americans had supported the democratic Spanish government, fascism would have been defeated in Spain, and World War Two could have been averted and many American lives saved". There was a perceptible stir when he said this. "I'll say to Dr. Gallagher", Gates concluded, "I'm proud of my 'lie' and I would do the same thing to defend democracy and fight fascism today!"

Another questioner later, referring to the changes toward more independent thinking and democratization recorded by the recent Communist Party convention, said: "Mr. Gates, how do we know you are sincere when you say you have changed in these respects?"

"We ask to be judged by deeds, and only that", was the response, "just like anyone else. If you are talking about me personally, judging me, I would say you have to know my life, my 26 years in the Communist Party. I happen to be proud of those 26 years."

Here he stopped and commented on the reaction of disbelief to his assertion about the meaning of Spain. "I was thinking about that

a minute ago", he said, "and realizing that I was talking about 1937, that those of you sitting here today who are 20 years old were just born then, and may know little about the real story of Spain and its relation to the whole fight against Hitler and the world war. You may know comparatively little of the great battles for unemployment insurance, the fight to build unionism, which fight was called a 'conspiracy,' just as our advocacy of socialism is today".

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THAT GATES had at least partly registered on this point was clear later when still another student doggedly insisted in a question: "But you really can't defend the past of the Communist Party. . . ." Gates won applause as he began his response with: "You SAY I cannot. I not only can but I do".

In developing the theme of the contributions in spite of mistakes, Gates added that this proposition also applied to the Soviet Union, the first land of socialism, which had been under blanket attack by his forum opponents.

"They did many bad things, it turns out, but they did many good things too", he said, putting it in broad terms, "not only for their own people but for the whole world. One of the reasons we are sitting here today talking peacefully about this is that the Red Army tanks, which today are only being criticized for their intervention in Budapest—a criticism with which I agree—these Red Army

tanks chewed up the Nazi Army in World War Two, and let's not forget that. I can tell you we American soldiers in Germany were mighty glad to hear of them advancing, and so was the whole world. We were grateful to have them on our side, just as they were glad to have us on their side, of course, in the common fight to save the world from fascism".

Americans, he said, will welcome the process of democratization here and in Communist Parties all over the world, and in the socialist countries. "If we sincerely want that process to continue", he said, "We have to fight for a better atmosphere in our own country, for an end to political persecution, for an end to the whole cold war, the building up of trade between East and West, and for the withdrawal of ALL troops from the soil of other countries, whether in the East or the West".

It was on this last key point that Thomas and Wolfe had diverged most sharply in the first day's debate. Challenged to sign a petition calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, Gates had said he would sign one calling for the withdrawal of all troops from all foreign countries they now occupied. Wolfe denounced this as a "Soviet trap", but Thomas, disagreeing pointedly, said: "Given the strengthening of the UN, and adequate controls, I would be for that. I would not rule that out as a dream."—L.R.