

1,000 at Boston Forum Applaud Gates' Peace Plea

By LESTER RODNEY

BOSTON, Nov. 25.—An observer at this old city's historic Ford Hall Forum last night could get a pretty good idea of what topic thoughtful Americans are most concerned with as the year 1957 moves toward its close.

Here was an audience of over 1,000, including a heavy representation of college age youth, which had given writer Granville Hicks somewhat more applause than Daily Worker editor John Gates at the conclusion of their opening prepared addresses on the topic "Has U. S. Communism a Future?" Yet the very same audience broke into the night's only sustained ovation when Gates later insisted nothing else mattered if the two big countries did not get together and stop the bomb tests and end the threat of war.

The high moment came in the question and answer period, when a man in the audience rose to ask Gates, "Why did it take you so

long to learn about Stalin?" and "You talked about the role armaments play in our economy. How about the heavy armaments of Russia?"

Gates strode to the microphone, which included the Harvard-run radio station WHRB, which was to re-broadcast the entire two hour proceedings at the school, while a popular FM station broadcast it in the Boston metropolitan area. He had already won applause from the audience with his candid replies, in which he said among other things that American Communists, though they had a continuing major role to play in bringing a socialist democracy to America, "no longer insist that we are God's chosen people and that only we can lead America to socialism."

He answered the questions with a quiet account of how he joined the CP in 1931, "in the midst of the great depression which you young people here only heard about." With his own country's

economy crumbling in the midst of potential plenty, he said, he could not help but be impressed by the steady economic strides being made in the Soviet Union. With the rise of fascism in the world, he went on, in 1936 he volunteered to fight for the legally elected Republican government of Spain against the invasion by Hitler and Mussolini.

"I found that only one country would give assistance to Republican Spain," he said, "England didn't, France didn't, we didn't. FDR later admitted this was his biggest mistake. Only the Soviet Union extended the hand of help to beleaguered Spain." He paused, and said with quiet emphasis. "So I had some reason for respecting Stalin—and the USSR. I submit, so did many Americans."

As to the heavy Soviet arms, Gates went on, that was true, but he reminded his questioner, the USSR had twice been invaded by capitalist countries, and even now

voices in our country for years have been calling for dropping bombs on Moscow. He detailed their staggering losses in World War II, one third of their country levelled and 20 million dead (at which there was an audible gasp from a few in the audience who were either not familiar with the figures or had forgotten them in these twelve years).

"Certainly they don't want war," he said, "and they have no reason for wating war. Nobody profits from war in a socialist society. Unfortunately there ARE people here who profit from war and war armaments, and they're not you or me."

The stocky dark-haired editor leaned forward and his voice rose in intensity.

"But let's say we disagree about some of these things, about whose fault the arms race is, theirs' or ours. We still have to agree that war is now unthinkable, that these bomb tests poisoning the world must stop!

"As an American I would like to see my own country take the lead and say we will stop the tests first! (Applause broke in at this point).

As a Communist, I would like to see the Soviet Union, a socialist country, do it first. But as a human being interested in the future of the species, I'm most concerned with BOTH agreeing to stop the bombs!"

Again the applause rolled out as Gates paused and waited.

"If we can stop the bombs, and end war," he concluded, "then we can discuss which is superior, capitalism, or socialism, otherwise there'll be nobody to discuss anything. Let's stop war and time will tell which social system is better. Whether you or I are right—the people will decide that."

As he turned to his chair the ovation rang through the hall. Next to me a row full of college-age men who had earlier hurled challenging questions at Gates were clapping as loud as they could, eyes alight with agreement.