

FEBRUARY 16, 1945

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## A Mob of Sheep

IT is still possible that the mob of sheep whose wanderings are referred to on Page 10 will wander a little farther. Some of them may even reach Kansu, their destination when they left Lyttelton on December 5, 1941. But whether they range as far as that or die in Tibet they will leave their mark on the sheep history of the world. A hundred years hence, and perhaps in a thousand, there will be some sheep in Tibet that are better than all the others, sheep which it will be a mark of distinction to own, whose wool will be a legend round the dung-fires, and for which now and again blood will be shed. They will be the descendants of the Lincolns, and Romneys, and Corriedales, and Merinos now reported to be grazing near Lhasa, and if the original mob moves a little north and a little west the biological circle will be complete. For if the origins of domestic sheep are obscure, the evidence seems to point to the Asiatic highlands between Tibet and Turkestan. There something wild was first tamed—a goat-like animal that probably had long hair and a short tail—and bred and fed into something that excited the cupidity of Europe. Now, thousands of years later, it has returned via New Zealand, not exactly an unrecognisable creature, but as different from the sheep that moved west in the dawn of history as Kindergarten is from the wild ass. It is possible too that man played the same part in its first journey as in its last. It did not leave Turkestan for better grass but because someone had a better sword or spear than its owner. It returned the way it set out, on foot and not by plane or lorry, because the Japanese had driven the Chinese from the Burma Road. And in all its wanderings it has been a benefactor. No sheep in a million years has done anything but convert grass into food and clothing. Now the destiny of our little mob is to increase the length, the weight, the durability, and the warmth of the fleeces that keep human beings alive near the top of the world.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## PORTRAIT OF COMMUNISM

Sir,—I write of your article on Communism and reaction, and the letters of Messrs. Winchester and Meek. I ignore anonymous letters. For myself I prefer to obtain my political facts from accredited sectional papers, ranging from the *Financial Times* through the various grades of thought and opinion to the *People's Voice*.

Yours is not a sectional paper; you, as Editor, are supported in your position as a Government employee by taxpayers who are Nationalist, Labour, Communist, or any one of many political shades. In a democracy any one of these factions is entitled to reasonable treatment; an attack on the beliefs of any one of them is a quite unwarranted presumption on your part.

Your paper is in the fortunate position of having a complete monopoly of the prior publications of radio programmes and radio. Owners who wish to know what is to come are compelled to consult *The Listener*. Possessing the public monopoly, it behoves you to tread very carefully. I will not grant that you are entitled to vent your political spleen through the columns of your paper, but having done so you should at least grant the full right of reply.

May I finally protest at your replies to letters; they convey nothing but ill-tempered intolerance of another individual's viewpoint. I find it regrettable that a paper, in some ways the best magazine in the Dominion, should descend to the level of the daily press in its attitude to contrary opinion.

G. H. SORRELL (Wellington).

[The alternative to a footnote is the waste-paper basket for a foolish and ill-informed letter: this letter, for example, which argues (1) that we have a monopoly of the programmes—the truth being that we supply the programmes every day to the daily newspapers, revised and corrected to a much later hour than our own dead-line; (2) that our article was an attack on the beliefs of Communists—the truth being that it was just as much a tribute as a criticism, written by a well-informed and not unfriendly observer; (3) that we refused Communists the right of reply—the truth being that every letter sent to us by Communists in reply to that article was published or accepted for publication (and will therefore appear).—Ed.]

Sir,—Your *Observer* article, I think, overstates its case with any allegation that Communists "despise and fear the masses." It seems to me impossible to deny that they are, by and large, actuated by a sincere pity and sympathy towards "the masses" (repulsive word) and a desire to better their standards of living. They do not, however, believe in the political ability of the average individual to do anything for himself; they do believe in a total, unified, and minority-run political structure; and they have a slavish and superstitious worship of the omnipotence of propaganda. They set well-being above freedom, "like the base slave who with a belly filled and vacant mind," false as the antithesis is.

These obvious comments bring me to the fundamental and generally ignored quarrel between Communism and Western Democracy. It is that from Pericles to Lincoln the essence of the democratic and liberal creed has been that the individual is the fundamental unit of society and that all politics are directed towards protecting his rights and fulfilling his needs. The rights of private judgment, tolerance and all

forms of intellectual freedom cannot exist apart from this belief. Now the Communist, whose human sympathies are the foundation of his creed, would be much happier if he could share this; but unhappily Marx saddled all his disciples with a portentous structure compounded of all the elephantine imbecilities of early nineteenth-century science and German philosophy: dialecticism, collectivism and materialism. The individual's actions and thoughts, according to this belief, are entirely produced by the impersonal forces of the workings of society; he has no existence apart from them and, as they change, he must change, too. "The individual," says Leonard Barnes, one of the most brilliant modern Marxists, "is only a ripple on the surface of society." This view, inevitably, is incompatible with any sort of liberalism or belief in individual values and rights. For this reason the *Observer* writer was justified in saying that Communists had "a dark fear of liberty, equality, and fraternity"; but the fear is so dark that it is often quite unconscious. Hence the perfectly sincere indignation of Mr. Meek. But the issue is a real one. Between these two creeds there can be no compromise; and as one is held by the Western powers and the other by the Soviet Union, while China hesitates between the two, a wider appreciation of the dilemma would appear important for the future.

J. G. A. POCOCK (Christchurch).

Sir,—*"The London Observer,"* says your correspondent Jas. W. Winchester, "is one of the most inveterate enemies of Communism; the mouthpiece of High Toryism and an unregenerate defender of Munich." But this propagator of Reaction is used most effectively by the Communists (any connection?) in their recent pamphlet on the Greek situation. Far from believing, as Mr. Winchester does, that the *Observer* is "bitterly opposed to any popular cause," the writer of this pamphlet finds its editorial on Greece so "true" that he quotes (in heavy type) a seventy-word passage from it in his opening paragraph. It is significant, too, that the pamphlet, "documented from the most authoritative sources" we are told, quotes largely from

More Letters from Listeners will  
be found on Page 23

"reactionary" newspapers and not once from Communist Party organs. For a Communist supporter, Mr. Winchester seems hopelessly out of touch with the latest "Party Line" on the Capitalist Press.—REMEMBER EARL BROWDER (Wellington).

## GILBERT AND SULLIVAN FOR SCHOOLS

Sir,—I feel that Gilbert and Sullivan should be included in the school curriculum side by side with Dickens and Shakespeare. Let all schools produce a Gilbert and Sullivan opera a year as part of the curriculum. Our young people enjoy tremendously the exquisite rhythm of both words and music. Many years have been lost in prohibiting many selections from programmes on account of the costly royalties, but the NBS has no excuse. The high price of the records would be repaid a thousandfold in the educational value to our youth. They should be repeated and repeated and explained on all stations. Let us have a Gilbert and Sullivan season each year, right through the Dominion and linked up with Australia, sharing expenses of soloists and costumes and scenery.

Again, the band concerts in the various rotundas in the city of Christchurch give good, well-balanced programmes; but could dance music be selected with the express purpose of encouraging dancing on the green? Tickle the feet and start with rhythm; it all has an influence far-reaching. Music has power to form character. The village green still holds a big future for a little imagination. In co-operation with the various swords and folk dancing clubs of the Dominion happy hours could be spent, not neglecting the community sing. All these pleasures have a health value too and at present are inclined to be done too much indoors. The rhythm will enable youth to hear what as yet he cannot see.—CORRIE ASLIN McLAREN (Christchurch).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT  
"Student": No information available on record.

## Yourselves and Ourselves and Some Others

WE are distressed when a subscriber writes complaining that his "Listener" has not arrived. When half-a-dozen subscribers do that from half-a-dozen places—well, nothing could distress us as much as that but the thought that it might happen without our knowledge. It is painful to be told that we have failed. To fail and not be told is horrible.

So we thank all those readers who complained last week, and the week before, and the week before that. It was good of them to write. But this is the kind of thing that was happening.

"Listeners" dated February 2 were printed and sent to rail in Auckland on Friday, January 26, and would normally have reached Wellington the next day. These were refused acceptance at the railway.

Monday, January 29, was Auckland Provincial Anniversary Day, so they were not accepted until the Tuesday. We were informed, however, that they would be forwarded by a train leaving at 7.18 p.m. on Tuesday.

On Wednesday we were informed that they were being forwarded by a train due in Wellington at 3.30 on Thursday morning.

The train with the "Listeners" actually arrived in Wellington at 11.0 p.m. on Thursday, February 1, and South Island supplies did not reach Christchurch until Saturday, February 3.

That, with variations, was the story of the issue of January 26, and the issue of January 19. When our readers were wondering what we were up to, we were wondering what democracy was up to, and how fast trains will ever travel on their own smoke.

Yes, we want to know when we fail to reach you. But now and again we want you to know what makes us fail, and how many things we are saying about other people when you are saying them about us.