

COMMUNISM AND THE WEST

Sir,—I wonder how P. J. Alley proposes to ascertain "whether there is anyone who would like to go back to Tsarism in Russia." Even if he were permitted to go to the Soviet Union and make inquiries for himself, he could not be sure of getting the truth. There is no "public opinion" as we know it, for criticism of the regime is not tolerated in a Police State, and the Russians have learned their lesson. Even if he could get freely expressed opinions—if we could imagine such incredible circumstances—I think he would meet with the characteristic Russian shrug and the common, cynical expression, "It's all the same!" They had the Okhrana in the Tsars' times, whereas they now have the M.V.D. "Politically accused" people are still "picked up" and often sentenced without trial, the only difference being that under the Tsars a prisoner, once he had served his term in the Lubyanka or Siberia, was a respectable member of society again until he repeated the offence. Certainly his family were not held as hostages for "confession" extractions.

They had not the universal franchise it's true, whereas today everyone may vote, but where is the value of a vote when there is but one name on the ballot-paper, and that candidate selected by a select committee? The mass of the people have been taught to read and write, but they may not read foreign books and papers, and they must not, if they write, deviate one inch from the Party line. Even under the Tsars a more liberal policy must have come, for the trade unions in Russia were growing strong—the real trade unions, not the pseudo trade unions they have now—and it might have come without bloodshed. P. J. Alley mentions "kulaks and landlords who exploited the people." He is not aware that any peasant who had more than two cows was reckoned a kulak, while those with five cows and over were "wealthy capitalists." And he surely does not think that the ten million peasants who were slaughtered or who starved to death were all kulaks! He might not even be aware that the peasants were not reckoned among the "proletariat."

Certainly P. J. Alley is right when he says that "Communism is stirring the peoples' imagination." Why shouldn't it, with its glorious promises? And it is not without its spectacular achievements. It is not till people come up against the stark and cruel reality of its totalitarian regime that they realise to what a state their credulity has brought them. As to the "right of Communists in this country to stand for Parliament and local bodies," I have often wondered how they dare to claim the right, since their sole objective is to bring to power a government that would prohibit even mention of an opposing party. I would advise P. J. Alley, who I am sure is sincere in his convictions, to hold fast to his democratic right of free criticism and his right of rejection or otherwise of any government, for if he loses those rights then indeed his "last state will be worse than his first."

JEAN BOSWELL (Auckland).

A STATESMAN'S SPEECH

Sir,—In your recent editorial portraying Mr. Attlee as a great statesman, you remark that "the alternative to understanding is the closed mind." But surely there is another alternative to understanding, viz., misunderstanding. And anyone who believes, as Mr. Attlee professes to believe, in the peaceful intentions of the Chinese Reds, misunderstands these men. Mao Tse Tung and

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his associates are Communists, dedicated to the task of making the whole world Communist, and prepared to use any means, including lies and murder, which will help them to achieve that end. Consequently, any statements they make about the achievements of their régime, or even about the population of China, should be taken with a grain of salt. Mr. Attlee retailed as plain statements of fact several items of information which he could only have learnt from the Chinese Reds and so made it plain that he did not understand the ideology of the men he was talking to. Similarly, if he really believes that the expulsion of Christian missionaries is due to nationalism and not to any detestation of Christianity as such, he does not understand Communism.

You urge us to look at "such facts as the existence of 600 million Chinese under a form of government which happens to suit them at this stage of their history." This calls for several comments. First, is it a fact that there are 600 million Chinese? Second, if this form of government suits them, it is curious that so few of the Chinese prisoners of war in Korea were anxious to return home. Third, this cold-blooded detachment towards the Chinese victims of Communist tyranny is appalling. It recalls Mr. Attlee's tribute to the Communist régime as "idealist, able and honest." That régime murdered several million Chinese in cold blood, but one can hardly expect a "realistic" politician to let that trouble him when it happens ten thousand miles from home. And now our great British statesman is proposing to hand over the inhabitants of Formosa to the tender mercies of Mao Tse Tung and the charming Chou En Lai. It's a pity he doesn't live in Formosa.

G.H.D. (Palmerston North).

Sir,—In fear-ridden and therefore intolerant days such as ours, an editor's lot, like that of another public functionary, is not always a happy one. Ingratitude and violent disagreement have a vocal resonance apparently denied to the virtues of assent. May we therefore pay this small tribute of appreciation of the responsible writing that appears in *The Listener's* editorials? More particularly, we would offer appreciation of the recent editorial on the Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee; it had a literary grace, a sanity of judgment and a responsible tolerance of spirit that made splendid reading. Francis Thompson's tribute to his dead cardinal has significance for the writer of the editorial as for the Attlee of whom he wrote:

He lives detach'd days;
He serveth not for praise;
For gold
He is not sold;
Deaf is he to the world's tongue;
He scorneth for his song,
The loud
Shouts of the crowd.

There are so very few of these rare birds about in these days of great social pressure and mass-consciousness, that to find one paying tribute to another in *The Listener* is an occasion worthy of note. (Rev.) L. GORDON HANNA (Hawera).

MATURED ART

Sir,—I always marvel at the temerity with which people summarily condemn the work of an artist. Recently there has been a spate of derogatory criticism levelled at Russell Clark, on whose

painting and sculpture an article appeared in *The Listener* not long ago. Three correspondents in particular voiced their disapproval in no uncertain terms (it being fashionable in this country to do so) but, running true to type, they propounded their arguments with hopeless inconsistency. To begin with J.H.H., who glibly misquotes Shakespeare. Granted, his quotation is textually accurate—but surely the most important thing about such an extract is its true meaning, and to whom can we make a better appeal for elucidation of this than the playwright himself, in his own application of art? Are Shakespeare's plays merely conversations, faithfully recorded from life? They must be, if Hamlet's speech has been properly interpreted by our correspondent, who would eliminate by his interpretation all artistic selection. "The mirror up to

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nature" has a far more profound meaning than was ever dreamed of by J.H.H. when he used it to infer (with his illustration from Picasso) that Giotto, Rembrandt and the rest simply rendered accurately the visual aspect of nature. The fatuity of this contention becomes, of course, obvious when one compares these masters.

Nothing need be said about N. R. Williams—his own epithets "prudish" and "barbarous" are well chosen and could not be more apposite. I would remind him of the critic who attacked Michelangelo, calling the great Last Judgment a "voluptuous bathroom": the voluptuousness lay in himself. As is to be expected, L. D. Austin indulged in his usual pointless dithyramb.

The whole matter, as the article so aptly put it, is one of conventions and their acceptance by the (often reluctant) public; this preoccupation with external appearance, to which so many people seem to attach so much significance is itself nothing but a convention—and a comparatively modern one at that.

D. E. CONLING (Mataura).

Sir,—Your correspondent J.H.H. is a public benefactor for quoting that statement of Picasso about his painting aims. In July the English *Listener* printed on its cover a reproduction of what it described as "The Athlete, by Picasso, one of the masterpieces from the Sao Paulo Museum of Art now on exhibition at the Tate Gallery." My immediate reaction was, where's the athlete, and where's the masterpiece?—and I was glad to find a correspondent in *The Listener* sharing my doubt. It is easy to see the mental process behind the caption. Here's a foreign exhibition, and in it a work by Picasso; it must be a masterpiece. J.H.H. has helped us to be wiser.

The superior attitude of art critics needs periodical hosing with cold common sense. Some months ago the Manchester City Council declined to buy a

"LISTENER" ELECTION CHART

LAST week it was announced that "The Listener" election chart would appear in the issue of November 5. It is now possible that full information about candidates will not be available in time for that issue, and the chart will therefore be published in "The Listener" of November 12. It will be on sale from Tuesday, November 9—four days before the election.

"Draped Torso" by Henry Moore, and the *Spectator*, with an acrimony one does not expect from it, chided a councillor for making a joke about the work. It received two somewhat stinging letters in protest. If this councillor liked beauty and failed to find it, asked one correspondent, might he not say so unashamedly? "It seems an unsatisfactory though too common implication that art which is Modern must be cotton-woolled against crude reactions of the uninitiated; that current vogues are gospel truth while beauty is stale and obsolete; that Art is to be approached with breath bated and head bowed; that a few Modern artists and critics know, and we ought to know they know. It won't do; it won't do at all." "It is far from being only the Philistines to whom the vogue in modern art is suspect," wrote the second correspondent. "The Philistines only 'know what they like'—and dislike; is there any articulate evidence that the cognoscenti do more than just that?"

I may add that I am acquainted with some of Henry Moore's work through illustrations, and am aware of his high standing in Britain and Europe.

VICTORIAN RELIC (Wellington).

Sir,—H.B.S. pays tribute to Russell Clark but qualifies it so far as his illustrations are concerned. "I feel," he says, "profoundly sorry for the writers whose ideas are often completely twisted."

As one whose occasional stories and articles in *The Listener* have been illustrated by Russell Clark I would say that on the contrary his illustrations add point to the stories and articles. I did not choose my illustrator, but I am sure the Editor could not have made a better choice.

JOHN BUCKLEY (Wellington).

SUNDAY PROGRAMMES

Sir,—I am very much of the opinion that a great deal could be done to make the Sunday programmes of 2YA more effective and more acceptable to listeners generally, particularly as regards the evening sessions. It must be admitted, I think, that the programmes submitted after the Church services are dead dull. Who listens, for instance, to the News in Maori? Do even many Maoris listen? There seems to be such jolly good and interesting stuff both in the morning and afternoon sessions that is largely wasted, for on a recent check-up I have made I have discovered that very few can or want to listen at those hours. Could not this good stuff be transferred to the evening sessions? I am aware that some of these programmes are sometimes repeated from 2YC, but I am speaking on behalf of a large body of country listeners.

There are many of us who come home from Church—and the Church-going public is not inconsiderable—who would appreciate a radical change in YA programmes on Sundays. These stations will have to do it, I feel, if they wish to retain at least their present very small percentage of listeners on Sundays.

F. O. BALL (Feilding).

"THE GOLDEN BUSH"

Sir,—Yes, indeed, do let us have more readings of the quality of *The Golden Bush* while we are so fortunate in having a reader, Basil Clarke, who makes alive whatever he reads. Many hundreds of us want this.

L.B.B. (Ashburton).