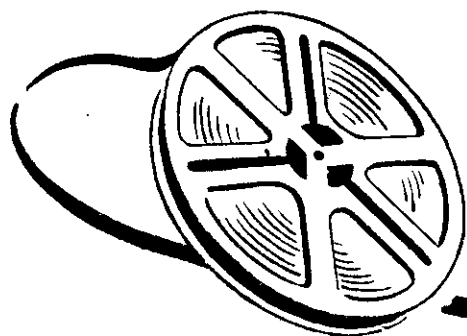




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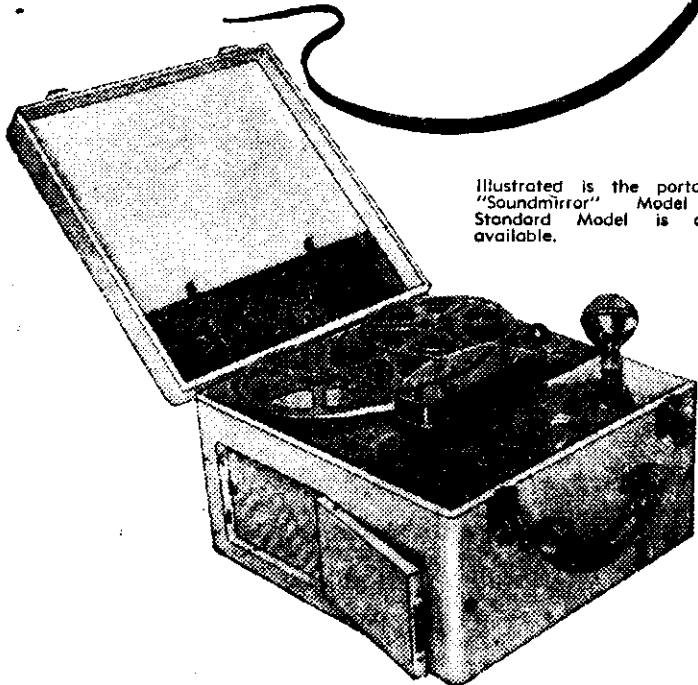
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Attitudes to Communism

THE BBC production *Focus on Communism*, announced on page 6, is an attempt to explain the most controversial political movement of our times with accuracy and detachment. This sort of treatment has become rarer than it used to be. The word "Communism" is often used in exactly or with emotion; it has grown to be a "stereotype" for fears and prejudices that are seldom examined. Yet its true meaning is simple enough if we confine it to the Communism with which we have become familiar—the political system adopted by Russia after the Revolution, set up in the satellite countries after the recent war, and advocated by parties, groups and individuals outside the Iron Curtain. The system is rejected by western peoples for several reasons: it is revolutionary; it can be established only by destroying the organs and institutions of democracy, so that it could not be removed except by counter-revolution; it replaces our objective code of law with a subjective practice which becomes the expressed will of a ruling group; it rests on materialist dogma; and it repudiates the rights of the individual.

These are essential features; but in practice there may be wide differences, brought about by political necessity or by variations of racial temperament. Thus Communism in Yugoslavia is a "deviation," in that it denies the supremacy of Moscow. And in China, where it may still be loosely established, it is being modified by the needs of an agrarian society. It is unrealistic to suppose that, because Communism is rejected by peoples with democratic traditions, it is unacceptable anywhere. In countries with much illiteracy and poverty Communism has an obvious appeal, for it gets results and gets them quickly. The Chinese peasant who has known nothing but war, hunger and suffering must not be expected to understand the democratic insistence on principles and liberties. His immediate concern is to be fed; and when he has been fed, and given his place in an organised

society, he finds in Communist doctrine the promise of national unity. This doctrine has different meanings for peasants in Asia and for western democrats. But people who are sympathetic towards the under-privileged are sometimes led to find a universal value in what may be useful in regional experience. They give themselves to a new faith, and they believe that the truth revealed to them should be imposed on the whole of mankind.

Communism may therefore be studied at several different levels. It is a political doctrine based on a materialistic interpretation of history. But it is also a way of life adopted and extended by a world Power, so that the argument cannot remain theoretical; it must be carried over into action at the frontiers, in the Security Council, and in every place where Russian and Western interests are opposed. Moreover, contact brings infection. Men who become aroused against Communism, fearing and hating it, find themselves fighting it with its own weapons. They are afraid of the party cell, the secret agent, the traitor and the fanatic; and to protect themselves they carry out purges, engage in heresy hunts, and place limitations on their own liberties. In these circumstances it is becoming difficult to see the world situation with any clearness. The absurdities may in future be dwelt upon with ironical interest, in much the way that some historians now write with raised eyebrows of ancient conflicts which seemed to have trivial causes. But the subtleties, the folly and credulity and downright wickedness are not amusing when they press upon us and threaten our peace and safety. We cannot see them with Olympian detachment, for if we refuse to take part in the struggle we must still be affected by the outcome. Yet we can at least know what has happened. A little more knowledge may help us to separate the fact from fiction, the truth from legend—and in so doing to keep in focus the dangers that are real, and to free them from dangers that are solely in the imagination.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 17, 1951.