

# The Superiority Complex

## HOKUM APPLIED.

SOME little while ago the Editor extended an invitation to all and sundry to take part in a "revival of learning"—as he expressed it. I am not sure whether this invitation was intended to include an attempt to reconsider the Party's "tactics" in the light of modern contributions to sociological thought. But I get the impression from recent issues of the "Clarion" that such an attempt would be regarded at least with slightly less disfavor than hitherto. Perhaps it is that the wish is father to the thought. However that may be I feel the impulse to write a little piece along those lines and, who knows, it may get by the Editor and I may once again experience that subtle exhilaration that comes from seeing oneself "in print."

Obviously the Party's tactics can only be intelligently considered with reference to its objective. It is only by considering what effect a man desires to produce that I can judge as to whether his methods are sensible. Despite a fairly long acquaintance with the Party I am not at all sure that I know just what its objective is. However, one must start somewhere so perhaps I will be permitted, for the sake of discussion, to assume that the Party's objective is approximately what presents itself to me as being implicit in the circumstances.

The Party is frequently described by active members as being a purely "Educational" party—in the sense, I take it, that while it endeavors to dispense certain information, to propagate a certain doctrine, to inculcate a certain social viewpoint having as its objective a certain Social Reorganisation it does not propose, as a Party, to take any more active part in such reorganisation.

It is one of the articles of the Party's faith, so to speak, that out of the material conditions of a given society is born the society that shall succeed it. If this were interpreted in its narrowest sense a purely "educational" party would be not only unnecessary but quite futile. The change would be such as material conditions determined and would occur when and how material conditions dictated quite irrespective of whatever mental condition might be. (There is room, of course, for much argument as to the precise significance of the term "material." But, if it means anything, it must surely be opposed to "mental.") Obviously then the Party believes that mental conditions can affect the anticipated change in some degree as to its nature or the time and manner of its occurrence. So that it would seem that the Party hopes by propagating what is sometimes called "Socialist Philosophy" to bring about the desired change more surely, or sooner, or easier than it would otherwise occur. But as this "Philosophy" can conceivably be effective only by its influence upon the minds of the workers, the Party's immediate objective, then, it to get this doctrine to the workers in a manner so convincing as to substantially influence their current conduct.

Now the manner in which this has been, and I suppose is still being, attempted admits, I believe, of no doubt. It is a matter of common knowledge at least among those of radical thought of notoriety. It is, with perhaps a majority of the Party's members, even a proud boast. It consists in general of plain and—should I say simple?—exposition of theory, of Socialist Philosophy—which, of course, to all good socialists is Truth—together with such sociological information as supports its conclusions, leaving the workers—such of them as will listen to it—to accept if they will and to act as it may move them. It will have no truck with reforms, no pandering to sentiment or emotion. Just the plain, unvarnished Truth.

There is a certain austere dignity about this attitude that, at first blush, seems positively awesome. It seems so virtuous, so chaste, so—so Holy that it feels almost like sacrilege to question it. Neverthe-

less this "Tactic" considered in the light of modern thought—or for that matter in the light of Marxian thought—and in relation to the objective as stated is, I am convinced, quite hopelessly ineffective.

The belief in its efficacy would seem to rest upon two assumptions, neither of which will bear a moment's reflection. First, that there is something inherently compelling in the Truth. That it has only to be proclaimed to be accepted and only to be accepted to influence conduct. Second, that man is so crassly materialistic an animal and so foresighted withal that the prospect of material betterment however distant will occupy his mind and influence his conduct to the exclusion of all sentimental or emotional factors.

Now, without raising here the vexed question propounded by that shrewd old rascal, M. Pilate, it must be fairly obvious that, in the matter of Truth, one man's meat can easily be another man's poison. One may offer information which one is convinced is of a nature most profound and positive; one may offer evidence, argument, proof which seems to leave no possible ground of objection unmet, but if the proffered Truth should happen to conflict with some immediate material interest or some emotional complex of the listener it has about as much chance of acceptance as one would have of persuading a sufferer from hay-fever that goldenrod is not an invention of the devil. Further, supposing there exist no such barrier to its acceptance, unless it connect itself with some immediate material interest or appeal to some sentiment or emotional complex it will influence the acceptor's current conduct about as much as the Truth about Betelgeuse influences mine.

The fact is that in matters appertaining to his material interests the average man is still the short-sighted animal that he seems always to have been. He sees only what is right under his nose. The only truths which have any compelling influence on his current conduct are such as connect themselves with his present needs. In the light of that classic The Materialistic Interpretation the whole of history is full of evidence of this. But one need look no further than the field of religion for confirmation. The average man may accept, more or less indifferently, certain sublime Truths regarding the riches that await him hereafter if only he will forego some of the good things of the present. But that these Truths influence him but little even under favorable conditions and that he frankly disregards them at such times as they run counter to his immediate necessities is a matter of such common knowledge that one hears it now even from the pulpit.

Further, he is so rank a sentimentalist that he will swallow even the bitter pill of immediate material disadvantage providing it be sufficiently well coated with the sugar of sentiment and emotional appeal. Consider how cheerfully withal he endured the hardships arising out of the late European unpleasantness, in large part because of the influence of such sentimental pish-mish as would leave intelligent men such as you, fond reader, and me quite cold. Think of the risks of death or disablement into which he permitted himself to be herded in his hundreds of thousands rather than face the slightly more certain unpleasantness contingent upon resistance. Consider the animal in the light of near and remote history. What are the strings by which he may be moved? Apart from actual coercion, with which we are not at the moment concerned, briefly they are two—immediate material interest and the appeal to emotion. At their behest he will endure the unbearable and believe the incredible. The lure of immediate material interest and emotional appeal cunningly compounded and artfully varied to meet local conditions formed the base of that astonishingly successful propaganda which forced him into the late war and kept him there for

four appalling years, which in a few brief weeks completely reformed the collective opinion of those fellow numskulls our neighbours to the South. And, if we search the records, we shall find that approximately the same may be said of every unpleasantness into which he has permitted himself to be led for the benefit of his masters. That is the kind of animal he is. He sees only what seems to his immediate interest and a little hokum judiciously applied will obscure even that.

All this, of course, you will be protesting fond reader, is nothing new. I admit it. I do not suppose for one moment that I am here bursting into the limelight with some hitherto undiscovered Truth. But I have a feeling that the fact and its implications with respect to socialist propaganda have not been fully appreciated. One hears so much of the alleged efficacy of "hewing to the line," "peddling the straight dope," "sticking to the facts" and so on that one falls almost insensibly into the belief that the well known "average man" spends his earthly existence in a feverish search for some incorruptible body such as the S. P. C. which will tell him the plain truth without trimmings. One hears so much of the exemplary virtue of this tactic that one almost believes that the sinister forces of Capitalism all are leagued to seduce us from this sacred duty. Such would seem to be the plain inference. Whereas precisely the contrary is the case. Should we ever desert the straight and narrow path we have held for so long and commence to make use of those powerful weapons by which the elect of the earth have so long held the rest of us in submission it is then we should come to realise just how jealous our masters are of their control over the minds of their puppets. As it is they leave us for the most part severely alone. Evidently they do not share the Party's belief in the potency of its tactic. And I am coming to entertain a suspicion that they are excellent judges of the means by which their slaves may be influenced. And as for the average man's yearning for plain, unvarnished Truth. The very idea moves one to great gusts of abdominal laughter. The poor boob is as suspicious of any truth that is not garnished with the usual hokum as he is of a liver pill bereft of the customary sugar coating and is as little likely to swallow the one as the other.

To such an animal the Party's "Education" seems somehow remote. The prospect of a great social betterment to come sometime, somehow does not enthuse him. There are a thousand and one problems of immediate need which harass him and in solving these the Party offers him no help. As, whatever else he may be, he is not a hypochondriac the Party's occasional disquisitions upon the iniquities and injustices of Capitalism, with which he is quite familiar first hand, do not interest him since they offer no prospect of immediate relief. Their rigid avoidance of all emotional appeal leaves him cold. He will flock to this lecture or that in his thousands from the Psychology of Salesmanship to Divine Healing, be profoundly impressed and contribute liberally. But if he should happen to wander into the Star on Sunday evening—assuming him not to be a regular pew occupant—he will arise and curse lustily in the middle of the sermon and in making his way out display an uncanny facility in avoiding the collection plate. In brief the Party's preachings attract him not at all except for such rare occasions as they touch upon some matter concerning his immediate interest—such an occasion, for instance, as when the Party held anti-conscription meetings, which action, I understand, is still held by some active members to have been a regrettable departure from the straight and narrow path. That is the kind of animal he is. It is a pity—perhaps. But damme if I can see what is to be done about it—except take him as he is and do the best we can with him.