

By the Way

MORE than anything else it seems to me, J. H. B's. reply in last issue to my article in the Jan. 2 issue serves to reveal a state of mind. His thought is violent, too violent to have a coherent background of philosophy based on a sober, contemplative study of humanity and its ways. His "science" is exploited to justify prejudice, and to support once-and-for-all-time adopted positions which hatred of troubling thought and respect for precedent do not wish disturbed. Something of fear, I might also concede inspires him, that socialist principle may be compromised in a shift to other positions. For that, I respect him, but I would respect him more if he did not use the arts of demagoguery to defend his position. Whereas his reply is such a mass of contentious half-truths, false preposition and therefore it follows, etc., etc., some of which common knowledge denies, that my space will not allow of serial rebuttal.

The shock of experience of the course of affairs since 1914, the fact that much was happening that was running contrary to socialist desire and prognostications spurred me into vague doubts and discontents with some of our Party attitudes. My doubts and discontent were strengthened by such study as I could give to the findings of those engaged in the field of the social sciences and by keeping in touch with the modern trend of thought and speculation on the problem of social change. As a result, I have arrived at a fairly coherent philosophy on the problem with definite conclusions regarding the Party, its functions and as to what its attitude and relations should be towards other organizations, political and economic, of the producing masses, agrarian and industrial. My conclusions, as I see them, turn upon methods and do not trench upon the fundamental principles of revolutionary socialism. For instance, I have advocated that all working class organizations should be regarded as institutions expressing the needs or carrying out the purposes of the working class in their several departmental activities, socialist educational and political, political reform and economic activities. Without prejudice to the debated question as to whether reform political parties can permanently improve the condition of the working class, I have advocated that the Party recognize them just as it at present recognizes the economic organizations of the workers, on that of a minimum basis of resisting the encroachments of capitalism upon the well-being of the workers. These recognitions should be based upon this—that degradation has no survival value, is inimical to the revolution, and that thus, the organized labor movement and the political reform movement function indirectly in behalf of the revolution. Again, in regard to methods, I have attacked the doctrine of violent overturn as an inexpedient method of bringing about revolutionary change, impractical in highly developed capitalist countries, and that other methods must be resorted to. In his reply J. H. B. seems to deny the efficacy of any method, other than violence, and therefore is committed to defending it and its propagation as a fundamental principle of socialism. But I hold we are not so bankrupt of ways and means as to be bound to any method and one that would, as I see it, result in disaster. However, in my articles giving my point of view I have attempted in a small way a restatement of the socialist philosophy in terms of this day and generation and if I have not got anyone to my way of thinking, perhaps a little grubbing around the roots of our philosophy will do no harm, even lead to lustier growth.

Looking over J. H. B's. reply, I can see that even if he was more careful of the truth and better informed on history he would still have fallen down in his argumentation—his ideas about the nature of man are at fault, and by that much he would still miss his mark. All discussion of the problem of social change and interpretation of history pivots

upon the nature of man. And my critic's human beings are such as were never on earth, for they are mono-maniac, hag-ridden creatures of a single devouring interest. Economic motives serve for him to explain all human conduct, the rest is "hypocrisy and sloppy humanitarianism." Accordingly, this is his idea of a modern community:—"An aggregation of human beings divided into classes and sub-classes, manifesting economic antagonisms, soaked in prejudices mutually hostile and exclusive, leavened with sloppy humanitarianism, insulting charity and religious hypocrisy." And this is how he idealizes an individual man! Referring to the factory regulations acts in the 19th century in England which put restrictions on the employment of children, took them out of the mines, reduced the hours of work in factories and introduced hygienic regulations, he introduces the man who was chief leader in these reforms, in this fashion, "... Such as Lord Shaftesbury, who perceiving that the unbridled exploitation of the workers in mill, mine and factory was fast killing the goose that laid the golden eggs of profit, and if the profit system was to continue the limits of human endurance must be recognized." "Foresighted," he calls him, this man who was a religious fanatic, a one-idea man who was difficult to get on with, who did slum missionary work before he started out on his long agitational work for the children of the poor. Economic motives do influence men's conduct and on occasion will dominate. But J. H. B. runs his theory to seed in the use he makes of it. He puts himself out of touch with ordinary humanity. Men in real life are men of many interests, many motives.

Of the innate, instinctive disposition of man, which he shares with other animals to herd in groups and defend the group, J. H. B's theory knows nothing. The thousand years of group life, the warp and woof of which are, likeness of temperament and physical feature, a common language, a common lore of legend and fact handed down in song and story from generation to generation by word of mouth or literature, a common group experience recorded not alone in the history books but also in ancient burial mound in cairn, in brass, or stone or marble, visualising to succeeding generations the continuity of the group down from the legendary past to the present. The great names the group elects to revere, its warriors, its chief rulers, its wise men, its artists, poets, priests and prophets reflect the group, its virtues, its vanities, its struggles as well as its failings. For, those whom it regards as its great men form a composite ideal of what the group would like to be. The common standards, conventions, usages, tacit understandings, customs, institutions, laws, history, religion, philosophy, art, science, politics, industry, peace and war, all alike bear the stamp of the genius of the particular group. Community! You could not escape the community. The renegade Englishmen who become more Irish than the Irish themselves or more German than the Germans, as Houston Chamberlain, are but paying a left-handed compliment to their English complex. Watch an internationalist and ten to one you will find him "placed" on Burns' Nicht. Soviet Russia repelled the foreign invaders because of love of Russia more than for love of internationalism. Russia first, is the dominant note of Soviet policies today; of necessity so since Russia is a community by racial inheritance of temperament and culture and by political organization and intimate economic relationships. Communities may be divided by class interest, partial herds within the larger herds, and classes may come into power and classes may go out of power, but so far as the masses of those engaged on either side of the struggle are concerned it is a community interest as well as a class interest and a possible international interest that inspires them. Men are creatures of many interests, not of one. Read the current literature, proclamations and propaganda ap-

peals of any great revolutionary period. "The world is my country, to do good is my religion," said Tom Paine. But he also helped to draw up the American Declaration of Independence. Economic impulses pursuing their will unchecked, unrestrained, unmodified by other interests and by social habits and standards are destructive. No group life could ever come into existence on that basis. Group life is at all possible because, in individuals, instinctive, cultural and rational interests live side by side, restraining or re-enforcing each other, with economic interests. When a man acts, the whole man acts. It can never be said of group man that he is driven by one interest alone, free, anarchic, untrammelled.

My critic, objecting to my use of the terms, "Community" applied to the national groups in society, says there are no communities. Yet he has himself witnessed the working classes sink the class-struggle in the broad sands of patriotism. When the herd leaders bellowed and the war drums throbbed he saw them streaming in from the ends of the earth in defence of their respective La Patrias and saw life-long internationalists and pacifists cast their principles to the winds. The national interest thrust itself uppermost, if only for the time being. What is the use of experience? He cites a long list of organizations, from Rotarians and the Red Cross to the Salvation Army as dispensers of "sloppy humanitarianism, insulting charity and religious hypocrisy" and this he sees as the only leaven in the life of a modern community. A scientific socialist of over fifteen years standing by his study of history, say under Professor Jenks and De Gibbins and other historians, and by his study of the origin and development of the institutional and cultural life of groups, say under Lewis H. Morgan and the later anthropologists—he should know that "insulting charity, sloppy humanitarianism and religious hypocrisy" and such organizations, if any there be, as are devoted to dispensing those delectables, are but the aberrations of a community and could by no means serve as bonds that would hold a community together: mere by-products and not the solid principles of associated life.

J. H. B. rages sentimentally about working class wrongs and capitalist class iniquities, packing his reply with recriminations. But the working class are not shedding any tears about their wrongs. He needn't worry. That aside, however, I want to put his interpretation of human conduct by economic motives to the test again. Take the case of the poverty stricken slum population of England. Poverty and riches in that country have existed side by side for nigh on two thousand years. All a theory of economic motives would see in that, would be two thousand years of predation, just as it sees in a "community" an aggregation of beasts of prey—one of those distorting half-truths which, if relied upon exclusively, are fatal to an understanding of the social problem. But here is another facet to life. By use, people become inured to poverty, either themselves, or to the sight of others existing in that condition, "and their withers are unwrung." There is as much indifference at the condition of the slum proletariat among the masses just above it as there is among the wealthier classes. Perhaps the slum populations themselves are the most indifferent about it of all. The cause is old "use and wont" and habit. J. H. B's. theory, however, knows nothing about those paralyzing forces of social inertia. But there is the fact that they have a stranglehold on the whole community in a multitude of respects. It is therefore useless to berate the capitalist class if we do not at the same time throw a due share of responsibility on the workers themselves. For if the workers never acquire a sense of responsibility by realizing that there are inert forces in themselves, they will never seek power to remove social evils. Character is the lever of change in the social environment: as forces, character and environment react