



Vote for Terry Park! The Common Sense Man

John Adcock

This is the chicken or egg conundrum. Which should the 40-year-old disillusioned schoolteacher, Terry Park, try to reform first: the whole of British society or its antiquated education system? With his new girlfriend, Susan Mansfield – a radical, strong-willed university lecturer – he tries to do both by forming his own political party and standing for Parliament. But Terry soon has more problems on his plate than he'd bargained for!

The Social Evening

A social is being held at Terry's lacklustre secondary school on the evening before interviews are held for the appointment of a new head teacher. It is hoped that in this way governors, candidates and some staff can 'get to know each other'. The food is mediocre, the wine anaemic, the music bizarre, the decorations uninspiring and the overall climate cool indeed. In this extract one governor, the influential Sir Quentin Reynolds, is talking to the 'highly unlikely to get the job' candidate, Mr Kurt Rommal.

'It is vital to address the differing needs of different age groups in schools more markedly than we do,' propounded Kurt Rommal, 'and, where possible, reduce the size of those groups even if it means fewer hours a week of direct, in-school supervision. I sometimes look at those classes which give teachers most trouble and think that, taken in groups of three or four, the young people in those classes would not cause such dire problems. There is something intrinsically different in the reactions we get from, and the relationships possible with, a party of three and a crowd of thirty.' He tapped his glass emphatically. His shirtsleeves were too long for his jacket; a broad, engraved gold ring adorned one finger. 'And when people reply contemptuously saying: "What's new?" I say: "OK, if you know it already, why not do something about it? For heaven's sake make an effort, just try – *try* something different!"'

Rommal paused. 'Many of these youngsters would be better off, Sir Quentin, having a teacher to themselves for just two or

three hours a week than they are spending over twenty-five hours in a classroom in an unwilling, conscripted group of thirty with a teacher who hasn't much of a chance and knows it! But I'm putting this badly ...'

'You're putting it very well. Go on.'

'This insistence on continuing in the same old way when there's so much better on offer makes me angry, and at times it shows. But it's children's lives we're dealing with, not shades of lipstick. Yet there's probably more money available for research into cosmetics than there is for exploring alternative ways of teaching children. I'm not saying no money's going into education, it's flooding in by the billion.'

'Just as it floods into the National Health Service or the Police Force with equally questionable results, perhaps?'

'Perhaps, but I don't know much about those. But in schools money alone is not the answer, especially if it's spent on the wrong things by people who don't know what's needed.'

‘So what is the answer?’

‘Ah! Now you’re asking! You won’t like this, but first politicians of all parties have to get out and stay out of areas they know next to nothing about.’ He paused, noting a change in the music; who the devil had given that miserable girl *The White Cliffs of Dover* followed by *There’ll Always be an England?* What sort of place was this? Would the national anthem terminate

proceedings with everyone leaping to attention? He’d already seen one Colonel Blimp character who’d salute the flag then open fire on any dissenters running to catch the last bus home.

‘Second,’ Rommal went on, recovering and speaking loudly above the din, ‘there must be a massive movement towards family support and family responsibility; and third, and you won’t like this either, a willingness on the part of teachers to form one trade union in order to use their combined muscle and experience to knock sense into the whole field of education from nursery schools to universities. It’s common sense that’s lacking more than money. And money won’t buy common sense – rather the opposite – it gets in the way. “Just shove in another million to keep the reformers and deschoolers at bay.”’ Rommal went to take a sip from his glass, forgetting it was empty.

Sir Quentin stood perusing Rommal. ‘You’re wrong about me, Mr Rommal, I do like what you say, or most of it.’ He hesitated. ‘And, I imagine, you’ll be interested in a fellow candidate’s attempts to get common sense onto the national map?’

‘If you mean Park, he hasn’t a chance. His Common Sense Party’s a non-starter; few will vote for him or for it. He and his friends are wasting precious time, energy and money that could be put into persuading one of the main parties, one with some punch, to *look* at new ideas. Labour might have done that once, but

not now; Mod Lab. is as hidebound as the others and their record on humanitarian, individualised education is appalling. They’re test and target mad.’

Rommel stared at Sir Quentin as a tall and attractive waitress refilled the good knight’s glass. He held out his own and, for the first time, smiled. And, as Sir Quentin observed, the young girl smiled back, pertly.

‘And, you Sir, are you on the Board tomorrow? If so, I might as well go home now!’ ‘No, I’m not on the governors’ interview panel but I am interested in ideas – even if there’s little likelihood of their coming to fruition. New ideas are vital, however strange. New ideas must never be suppressed. Now Mr Rommal, it’s been good talking to you although I’m sad to see you so pessimistic about the CSP. If common sense cannot get a foothold in its own right I fear for the future.’

We hope you enjoyed this extract from
Vote for Terry Park!

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