

ADVERTISING DIANETICS - PROPAGANDA - PUSH BUTTONS

A lecture given on
4 September 1950

A lecture entitled "Advertising Dianetics—Propaganda—Push Buttons" was given by L. Ron Hubbard as part of the Professional Course in Los Angeles on 4 September 1950. Although a full recording or transcript of this lecture has not been found, a short tape recording was located covering the subject of push buttons. It is possibly a segment of the 4 September lecture and is reproduced here.

The Stimulus - Response Mechanism

I have mentioned push buttons before. I am not going to give you a very extended lecture on it, but I will cover the basic fundamentals of various essential and nonessential actions in which the human race engages.

This lecture might also be entitled "The Value of the Reactive Mind to the Comptrollers of the Society."

The reactive mind is a very, very valuable thing. Without the reactive mind, advertising agencies would probably be out of business, psychological warfare could not be contemplated, we would be at peace with Russia, a lot of Koreans would be alive, and other "undesirable" things would happen.

The reactive mind has a very great value to the politico, the advertising executive, or anyone who wishes to convince any body of people of an irrationality, of the truth of a lie.

It is very easy to get on the radio and keep talking about Ex-Lax, and have people, finally, stampeding the stores to buy this product which, as a matter of fact, contains phenolphthalein solution and is very injurious to the human system.

Now, it so happens that the human body doesn't have any trouble with constipation. There is nothing easier to control than the bowel action of the organism. You could take any hypnotic subject and with a short command constipate him for a couple of weeks, if you wanted to, or you could give him diarrhea for a couple of weeks. In other words, this is the easiest fluid flow or physical action in the body to control, because it works regularly. It is interesting that radio advertising concentrated on constipation, and great fortunes were made out of stuff like Ex-Lax. Practically all the farmer's almanacs pay for themselves on ads about constipation.

When radio advertising or printed advertising is placed before human beings they can be worried about this function and the function can be cut off, certainly on all those people who have "you've got to believe everything you read" engrams. And if you put it on such an authoritarian line, the condition is created and the remedy is sold for it simultaneously.

So, making something wrong with people in order to get money for making it right is a typical push-button operation! The situation is created in order to sell the remedy. It isn't necessary to create the situation, however. It is only necessary to accelerate it.

Somebody being told that "we have to make the world safe for democracy" is just getting another sample of Ex-Lax advertising. It is not a rational statement. Certainly, thee and me have a very nice country and we have every right to protect that country, to grow in it, to square around, to govern the country sentiently, to make better Fords and Buicks, and even to make radios on which to advertise for Ex-Lax. We have all those rights, but I'm afraid it hasn't got much to do with a slogan. That is just another pushbutton proposition.

If we are able to do all this, we can do it through the application of great reason, finding out what the problems are and how to solve them. Whether we are a democratic form of

government or a government of communistic cells is not the point, these are labels. The whole point is, are these forms of government reasonable? Well, it so happens that they are not.

Thomas Jefferson, on the subject of democracy, has been terrifically violated time after time. As a matter of fact, Jefferson, who had the biggest hand in the writing of the state papers on which all of our liberty depends—on which this very nation was founded—is now considered so radical that when an article was in process for Colliers magazine on him, the content of that article was looked over in the high editorial echelons and they said, “Oh, no, we can’t publish this fellow!” In other words, Thomas Jefferson is now too strong for the stomachs of America!

Unfortunately Thomas Jefferson didn’t talk in terms of push buttons. He tried to talk in terms of reason.

Today, we are getting a lot of push-button government. I am not against the United States Government and they are not against me. But I am certainly not in total agreement with the U.S. Government as it is run today. That is one of the primary principles of democracy: You stay out of agreement with the government, and then the government gets some pressure on it and sooner or later will square around and resolve some problems. That is the protesting minority principle. But one doesn’t have to set it up on this crude line. The point here is the fact that the government today is doing more and more and more push-button governing. Children in school are taught some motto. Then afterwards you can ask someone carefully, “Why is that right?”

And he will say, “Well, my teacher in the first grade said so!”

“Is she an authority on government?” You can go right down the bank and cut a person to pieces on the subject of surrendering to governmental mottos.

We take the word freedom. There is an interesting word. Once upon a time, freedom meant something very broad. It meant, on one side, a man’s right to decide for himself and to continue to decide, at his own crossroads, what he was to do with his life and the society in which he lived. That was freedom! But it also included the Achilles heel of being permitted to go out of work and starve. It was also given to a group of people who, reactively enchained, were basically slaves. And so, freedom, as a sort of a shotgun thing, had to be modified and modified and modified until we get this great statement “Freedom from want!”—the one thing which you can’t have with freedom. With individual freedom there can be no freedom from want. So the instant we say “Freedom from want” we have done a reactive jab on the whole subject of freedom, and after that, one party, one action, are the future consequences of such a statement. That is push-buttoning.

One is taught that the word freedom is good. Then, as the years progress, the word freedom is less and less assigned, its definitions aren’t included with it; but we know that “the boys at Bunker Hill died for freedom!” We know that so-and-so “gave his all for freedom!” We know that “we are a great nation because we are a free nation!” “which has nothing to do with the problem. We might be a great nation because we are rational, because we are strongly energetic, because we have enormous resources, good blood, good people, and because we know something about political philosophy—but not because we are “free.”