

Clayton Fritchey

A Political Prescription

One of the more exotic characters on the American scene today is a doctor who has a name that sounds as if it were made up by Art Buchwald. He is Dr. Arnold Hutschnecker, some of whose ideas also sound as if they were invented by the humorist.

Nevertheless, the aging doctor's bizarre notions, which often border on science fiction, command public attention, not because of his standing in the medical profession but because he has been physician to the most powerful man in the world—Richard Nixon.

Three years ago, Dr. Hutschnecker, who practices psychotherapy (whatever that is) in New York City, made the front pages when he laid before his distinguished former patient a novel plan for wiping out crime in the United States within 10 years. This called for the compulsory psychological testing of all 6-year-old children to determine potential future criminals. All the suspects would have been subjected to treatment or isolation in special camps.

The public reaction to this authoritarian scheme (Dr. Hutschnecker was born in Berlin) was so violent that the administration soon disowned it, although, at the instance of the President and his then top aide, John Ehrlichman, the proposal was given serious consideration at the highest level of the government.

But Dr. Hutschnecker is not easily discouraged. He still wants to eliminate crime, except now he would attack it through adults as well as children. He is so disturbed by Watergate,

despite his old patient's involvement in it, that he feels the country must guard against another one. So he proposes that all future presidential candidates be required to pass both physical and mental health tests.

Some of Dr. Hutschnecker's professional critics make a point of his not being a psychiatrist, but there is no denying that he writes well and has a lively interest in contemporary problems, which is more than can be said for many in the medical field. His problem, however, seems to be a naive faith in the ability of psychologists and psychiatrists to predict human behavior.

This wouldn't matter much if Hutschnecker was just another anonymous doctor, but his known access to the White House has also given him access to the leading newspapers and magazines. He has, for instance, just favored the New York Times with a special article in which he reflects on the lessons of Watergate in surprisingly liberal terms.

Yet, in conclusion, he asks, "What method of measure can we apply to evaluate the integrity or honesty of purpose and humaneness of a person who is about to enter a position of power in any branch of government?" Then he complains that he "has been attacked for having suggested that candidates, before being allowed to enter a political race, ought to be cleared by a board of physicians and psychiatrists to make sure that they are healthy in mind and body."

Dr. Hutschnecker, properly concerned over the aggressive, militant at-

titudes of our political leaders, proposes that "a clinical as well as a psychoanalytically oriented physician should take part in the policymaking of our federal or local governments." And he adds: "While some of these doctors may not always be infallible or the wisest, they have at least been trained in assessing human behavior objectively, and can raise their voice when human ambition and greed or drives for an uninhibited use of power seems to be getting out of control."

Good for Dr. Hutschnecker. But, having become acquainted with the President when he was treating him in New York between elections, does the doctor really believe that White House ambitions would have been abandoned if there had been a behaviorist present to "raise his voice" against Mr. Nixon's (or any other President's) "uninhibited use of power"?

Psychiatrists are no more "professionally" qualified to manage the selection of candidates in a democracy, says Richard Betts of Harvard, "than my own fellow political scientists, and I am sure Dr. Hutschnecker would not be willing to entrust the job to Dr. Henry Kissinger or McGeorge Bundy."

Betts feels that Dr. Hutschnecker's proposal is "grounded in the fallacy that personality disorders are the prime causes of aggressive action in domestic and international politics." For, as Betts notes, "the use of military force has generally been due not to leaders' neuroses, but to their ideologies and perceptions."