

A Fresh,
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Clean
CIA
Cortex

By Russell Baker

In the 1950's the Central Intelligence Agency became intensely interested in brainwashing. It had heard that the Communists had a new wash-day product which could get brains twice as clean, and since the cold war was going full blast it naturally feared a dangerous brainwashing gap.

Allen W. Dulles, then Director of Central Intelligence, ordered a crash program. It was a normal reflex. People were always ordering crash programs in those days. It didn't matter that they often ended in crashes.

I remember the day Mr. Dulles ordered it. He was in his office looking for a banana republic to overthrow that weekend when his brain came back from the laundry. When he took it out of the package he was furious because it had ring around the medulla.

Moreover, in their efforts to get it sparkling clean, his brainwashers had used too much bleach, which had eroded the fabric and left both the id and the ego badly frayed. He summoned his brilliant assistant, Richard Bissell, and asked if he could borrow Mr. Bissell's brain to wear to a dinner that evening for Winston Churchill.

"Out of the question" said Mr. Bissell. "Those idiots washed it in hot water with a red shirt, which ran all over the frontal lobes. You'd look like a rainbow."

"They don't call you brilliant for nothing, Bissell" said Mr. Dulles. This was where I came in. I didn't actually enter that vault of secrets, but sat in an ice cream parlor over a sundae when a cunning man with banana-republic dust on his armpit holster sat down beside me.

"How would you like some really hot action, Generalissimo?" he asked. Who wouldn't? He took me to a \$15 million hotel suite which was supplied with LSD, rye whisky, loaded dice, copies of the Civil Service Gazette and stunning women who had been graded "prime" by the United States Department of Agriculture and certified loyal by the F.B.I.

The whole set-up would have cost a defense contractor maybe \$350 tops. Since the host was paying \$15 million for it, it took no deductive power at all to see that it was being run by the C.I.A. In jig time one of the women was running her fingers through the most primitive folds of my brain.

"My, what a nice fresh brain you have" she murmured.

"It's never been used," I boasted, yielding to the stupor of ecstasy. "What's more, it has the new button-down brain stem and the buttons haven't even been cracked."

When I awoke, my brain was being worn by Allen Dulles and Winston Churchill was sitting across the dinner table. "Is it true" asked Churchill, "that you cannot rent a hotel suite full of dope, broads and booze for less than 15 million bucks?"

Mr. Dulles laughed. "Ho ho ho." He was a great laugher, and also a great pipe smoker, whereas I am somewhat sour and like to chew gum. "I knew you weren't wearing your own brain tonight, Winnie" said Mr. Dulles. Ho ho ho. "Having a bit of trouble in the famous British Secret Service's brainwashing department, eh? Ho ho ho."

"Ho ho ho, yourself, you bloody idiot" said Churchill. "Sitting there chewing gum after every course and cracking that sour ho ho ho—it's a dead giveaway, mate. The great arsenal of intelligence is so far behind the Commies in the old skull scrub that you don't have a brain left that's fit to show its cortex at the May Day parade."

President Eisenhower, who had been drinking straight gin throughout the meal and was carrying on shamelessly with Queen Elizabeth, interrupted his horseplay to glare at us. "Button your lips, the two of you, or I'll throw your butts out of here" he snarled.

"You tell 'em, daddy baby" said the Queen, "and especially that ho ho ho creep. What kind of creep would chew gum after every course and not even offer a stick to the Queen?"

In short, the evening ended nastily. On arrival home, Mr. Dulles had a loosened tooth, the result of a surprisingly good right jab from President Eisenhower, and a cut on the cheek where Queen Elizabeth had struck him with a silver candlestick. In short, it wasn't nice. Government folks often aren't. National security and all that. Ho ho ho.

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