

Charles McCabe Himself

Squeezing Hitler's Squash

ONE OF THE more bizarre expenditures of public monies in World War II was an elaborate project whereby the soul of Adolf Hitler was probed for our spy apparatus by a Cambridge shrink named Dr. Walter Langer, helped by three psychiatric colleagues. None of the analysts had met Der Fuehrer, and based their psychiatric "profile" on things heard and read at second or third hand.

The book, which revealed nothing a shrewd wire service newspaperman in Berlin could not have come up with in 1943, was recently published under the title "The Mind of Adolf Hitler." This led the physician's monthly Resident and Staff Physician to ask 1574 doctors what they think of this sort of "long distance psychiatry."



What was surprising about the response was not that the questioned doctors took a dim view of the idea that the U.S. should be psychoanalyzing world leaders from afar; but that the dim view should have prevailed by such a narrow margin. Questioned were family physicians, hospital MD's other than psychiatrists, and psychiatrists.

To the question: Do you think it would be possible to do meaningful, accurate psychiatric evaluations of other nations' leaders? Forty-five per cent said Yes and 55 per cent said No.

To the question: If possible to do fairly accurate analyses, do you think the potential benefits to our country and the world would outweigh the potential dangers? Sixty per cent said Yes and 40 per cent said No.

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I FIND these responses just another proof of the mass backwardness of physicians when they act or think as a group. The mere fact that so many of them could take seriously a prima facie bit of nonsense is a bit disconcerting. Oddly enough, the greatest skepticism about this sort of "psycho-history" was expressed by the psychiatrists as a group.

The two most sensible replies printed from non-shrink medicos seemed to me to come from doctors in Modesto and Wilmington, Del. "This is a terrifying proposal," said the Modesto doctor. "To think that a group of doctors who possess the highest suicide rate among the medical profession's various divisions would have this influence is sobering enough. Then I recall 1964 when there were many psychiatrists who 'declared' Barry Goldwater insane from newspaper quotes.

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"AND HOW MANY times have we read of patients being released after commitment for various crimes only to repeat these same crimes within days of being declared stable enough to re-enter society? No thanks! Let them have a good time psychoanalyzing each other — heaven knows most of them need it enough."

Said the Delaware doctor: "Thank you for writing to a 'foot soldier' — i.e., a primary care physician. The implications of 'diagnosis' without ever seeing or examining the patient are staggering. If psychiatrists can so diagnose, why can't all MDs diagnose and prescribe over the telephone?"

"The hypothesis furthers a growing sentiment that psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers and psychiatric technicians are well removed from the mainstream of medicine. Somewhere, sometime, someplace, someone is finally going to say that 'the emperor has no goddamn clothes.'"

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A NEW YORK CITY practicing psychiatrist is even rougher. He notes the various psychiatric speculations about Senator Goldwater in 1964 and Presidents Johnson and Nixon since. These lucubrations, he said, "attest to the unfortunate tendency of some psychiatrists to make pronouncements of no more value than if they had consulted tea leaves, astrologers, entrails, the flights of birds, tarot cards or any other human-made devices for reading the future.

"God help us if our State Department relies on 'absent treatment' or 'long distance' evaluations. Dr. Walter Langer should have his own squash squeezed by a competent psychiatrist."