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How the Reds Brainwash

The Interrogator Acts as if the Prisoner is Guilty

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(Last of two articles.)

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Malevolent interrogators of the communist state police, some schooled in dreadful skills, can work their will on a prisoner conditioned by prolonged isolation.

Apply mental and physical pressures, then relaxing them, then imposing them again — questioning, questioning, questioning — the Russian police usually can make a prisoner say what they want him to say.

If he does, he has been "brainwashed."

The techniques have been described in a special report by two medical doctors, former consultants to the defense department.

Drs. Lawrence E. Hinkle Jr. and Harold G. Wolff, of New York, called their analysis "communist interrogation and indoctrination of 'enemies of the state.'" Copyrighted, it was published in the August, 1956, issue of the American Medical Association's "archives of Neurology and Psychiatry."

¶ Nobody Knows

No one here knows for sure that American spy plane Pilot Francis Gary Powers, has been "brainwashed" by his Russian captors.

His father has been told by experts here that he was probably kept in solitary confinement for a 10 to 15-day "treatment."

If so, then some here believe it may have been part of his "conditioning" for interrogation and his Moscow espionage trial scheduled Aug. 17.

Moscow dispatches report pilot Powers has pleaded guilty to the espionage charges.

Drs. Hinkle and Wolff say the Russian State Police, the KGB (The Committee for State Security) "will not expose a prisoner to public trial unless it is convinced that he will go thru with his confession as planned."

The communist police are, of course, not infallible. Some Russians put on trial have recanted. But in any event they doubtless were subjected to the interrogation techniques Drs. Hinkle and Wolff described, usually

on the heels of carefully organized total isolation.

A human being, removed from all social contacts, finally may take on the docility of a trained animal under the pressures of utter loneliness, prolonged uncertainty, anxiety, fatigue, lack of sleep, uncomfortable cell temperatures and chronic hunger.

Then he is ready for the communist interrogator.

¶ How It Begins

"The interrogation begins," doctors report, "when the officer in charge feels that the prisoner is ripe for it. This is usually when he observes that the prisoner has become docile and compliant and shows evidence of deterioration in his mood and personal appearance."

The stage for the questioning is carefully set. Usually, interrogation is carried out at night. The interrogator may be dressed in full uniform. He may lay a cocked pistol on his desk.

"Suddenly, without explanation, the prisoner is taken from his cell and down several corridors to a small and barren interrogation room, equipped with a desk and a chair for the interrogator and a stool for the prisoner," says the Hinkle-Wolff report. "The lighting is arranged so that the prisoner can be placed in a bright light, while the interrogator sits in relative darkness. Sometimes a stenographer is present in one corner of the room..."

If the prisoner is timid and fearful, the interrogator will be fierce and threatening. If proud and sensitive, the interrogator will be insulting and degrading. If the prisoner has been a man of prestige, the interrogator will treat him as an inferior. If the prisoner is venal, the interrogator may try to bribe him with promises of reward for co-operation.

¶ The Attitude

"Almost invariably," the report says, "the interrogator takes the attitude that the prisoner is guilty and acts as tho all of his crimes were known."

"Almost invariably the interrogator does not accept the early statement of the prisoner. No matter what crime he confesses the interrogator forces the prisoner to repeat his statements again and again, and to elaborate on them endlessly."

"Almost always he uses any discrepancies as indications of lying and questions the prisoner at length about them."

And the prisoner does talk. The doctors explain why:

"... Taken from his cell after a long period of isolation, anxiety and despair (he) usually looks upon his first interrogation as a welcome break. The mere opportunity to talk to someone is gratifying. Many prisoners... try to prolong (the interrogation sessions) for the companionship they afford."

Sooner or later the interrogator expresses dissatisfaction with the answers of the prisoner. When the prisoner protest he has told all, the interrogator becomes hostile. He can begin to apply further pressures.

"Continuous and repetitive interrogation is an effective and very common form of pressure," Drs. Hinkle and Wolff report. "Another... is that of requiring the prisoner to stand thruout the interrogation session or to maintain some other physical position which becomes painful... After 18 to 24 hours of continuous standing, there is an accumulation of fluid in the tissues of the legs... The ankles and feet of the prisoner swell to twice their normal circumference... The heart rate increases and fainting may occur."

¶ Sudden Change

"The interrogator will continue this pressure until he feels that the prisoner is nearly at the end of his rope... he suddenly changes his demeanor."

"The prisoner, returned once again to an interrogation session that he expects to be a repetition of torture and villification, suddenly finds that the entire scene has changed. The interroga-

tor is relaxed and smiling. Tea and cigarets are waiting on the table. The interrogator is sympathetic about the discomfort, sorry that the prisoner has had such a difficult time... 'Let us relax and be friends... why don't we get this over with so that everything can be settled and you can be released?'

"Prisoners," says the Hinkle-Wolff analysis, "find this sudden friendship and release of pressure almost irresistible. Nearly all of them avidly seize the opportunity to talk about themselves and their feelings... Most of them proceed from this almost automatically to giving the information which the interrogator seeks. The interrogator smiles and congratulates him..."

¶ New Session

That session is ended. A new one soon begins. Pressure and hostile questioning is resumed. Again it is carried to the point where the prisoner is near breakdown. Again it is relaxed. Alternately punishing and rewarding the prisoner, the interrogator constantly presses him to revise and rewrite his statement, his confession. Finally, it suits the interrogator.

"When it has at last been agreed upon and signed," say Drs. Hinkle and Wolff, "the pressure is relaxed 'for good'; but the prisoner continues to live in his cell and remains under the threat of renewed pressure, until such time as he has been taken before a 'court,' has confessed, and has been 'sentenced'."

Men under the complete control of communist police, say the two doctors, have been made to say and do many things which their captors desire.

In the common phrase: They have been "brainwashed."