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COMMUNIST MENTAL CONDITIONING FOR CONFESSIONS

(98)

*13 pages of dictation  
7 pages 1955*

1. Mental conditioning is pre-eminent in theory, concept, and practice in the USSR and has permeated the entire Soviet sphere of influence. It is in consonance with Pavlov's physiological teaching, the most recent Soviet research work on conditioned reflexes, and Soviet ideology.

2. Communist mental conditioning covers all methods, from persistent education and mild persuasion to techniques for forced transient softening or complete permanent breakdown of the mental faculties of the victim. This can be done without drugs.

3. The voluminous Soviet medical literature definitely conveys the impression that the USSR is using all of the modern psychiatric techniques used on patients in this country.

4. Although the Soviets have relegated psychology to the field of pedagogy, the emphasis placed on research in neurophysiology, physiological psychology, and neuropsychiatry indicates that the USSR considers these fields of practical importance. The Soviets are adept in the application of the results of their research in these fields to mental conditioning, including the handling of prisoners.

5. There have been some reports on Communist mental conditioning of prisoners in general, such as the common practice of handing pamphlets on Communism to prisoners, followed by the delivery of talks on the advantages of Communism. They sell Communism to many prisoners by daily repetition, even three times a day at regular intervals.

6. The Communists have had thousands of prisoners and years of experience in the development of methods for the mental conditioning of prisoners.

7. They are ruthless in the use of methods to force prisoners to reveal information which may be truthful or false.

8. Because of the effect on world opinion, we can expect that the Communists will use conventional psychological interrogation techniques on many prisoners, and treat them in accordance with Geneva agreements. This has and will be done with prisoners they willingly return.

9. There were psychological reasons, including favorable propaganda as well as problems of care of the wounded early in the Korean conflict, for the Chinese release of small groups of prisoners to the American lines.

10. There is no reason for not believing that the Communists can readily obtain confessions without, as they claim, "old-fashioned torture," or the use of drugs. No doubt they have in mind mutilation and other ancient practices of physical torture, and do not consider that torture includes mental duress, starvation diets, and other methods of exhaustion to the degree of submission.

11. There are reasons for believing that drugs would to a certain degree accelerate obtaining confessions, but no reasons for believing that drugs are reliable for obtaining truthful information.

12. The vast experience of the Communists surely has convinced them that somewhere along the line of increasingly drastic measures the resistance of any man will break and he will usually, but not always, reveal the truth. Also, that mental resistance, including subconscious resistance of some men, is strong enough to withhold secret information. The breaking point in some men would not be reached until their mental faculties are so abnormal that the information they give may or may not be the truth. The Communists probably have been successful in obtaining truthful information from many men by their methods because most men would tell the truth before they reached the later stages of mental duress.

13. We have no indications that they know any methods not known in this country for determining the truthfulness of information obtained from prisoners.

14. They carefully select their victims for specific purposes, such as those who will make an impression for propaganda purposes, as did the American Air Force officers who apparently cooperated as propaganda dupes in the production of the sound picture to help the Communists convince the world that their EW charges were true. Probably the reasons for their apparent cooperation will not be known until there is an opportunity to debrief them.

15. Some of their victims are easy prey, not by direct threats and more drastic duress, but by another approach such as telling them they will be treated well and returned to their homeland in good mental and physical condition if they cooperate.

16. Some prisoners are well aware of stories about the handling of victims, such as subjection to exhibition for ridicule, traumatism, and even death by public mobs; physical duress; never returning home; and even beheading, shooting, or other penalties by their captors.

17. The fear complex produces many submissive persons. They know open defiance of captors is not healthy and have not had adequate training to save themselves and protect security.

18. The usual techniques against resistant prisoners appear to be clever persistent conventional psychological interrogation followed in some cases by methods of exhaustion, particularly of the nervous system. Apparently this is accomplished by starvation diets, barbarous quarters, not allowing sleep, and strained constant standing and other postures. In some instances, nerve stimulant drugs are used as adjuncts in exhaustion.

19. Although we have no evidence that the Communists depend upon the use of any one drug or combination of products or devices routinely in interrogations, their past treatment of some prisoners gives us warning that we can expect them to use drugs and other products, devices, and methods under certain circumstances and as hopeful supplements in the handling of prisoners they have no intention of releasing.

20. Among Communist activities against special prisoners, we can expect all kinds of trickery, drugs including toxic substances, electric and other applications to induce shock, the polygraph, hypnotism, nerve blocking injections, and even lobotomy and other surgery.

21. Drugs and other supplementary techniques may be used not because any method assures veracity in every individual, but because any means of loosening tongues such as the effects of euphoric drugs and alcohol or narcotics and other methods for obtaining information in subconscious states may evoke true or false information from a number of persons. Sodium amytal and other well known drugs would be effective in a limited number of cases, without the nerve exhaustion techniques. By an analysis of the combined statements from a number of prisoners it might be possible to delete false statements.

22. Defense against enemy actions should cover careful selection of our agents including special testing with harmless techniques, thorough mental conditioning, and the use of materials to counter enemy actions. Many will break down regardless of preparation.

24 February 1953

2/26/53

AD/SI

I feel that the tone of these papers is good. Unfortunately, there was not time to revise the language before it went to DFO. - Before any use of the new, blank paper is made, it must be carefully reviewed and revised.

3/3/53 - only 1 memo sent for file in office