

Kremlin Psychiatry

An interesting psychiatric diagnosis is in the news these days: incipient schizophrenia accompanied by paranoid delusions of reforming society. One can well imagine a psychiatrist working for the secret police of Czar Nicholas II pronouncing this verdict on Lenin, or a psychiatric henchman of Stalin declaring a similar judgment on Khrushchev had the latter ever had the temerity to reveal his inmost thoughts before Stalin's death.

Just such a "diagnosis," given by a K.G.B. "psychiatrist," did—as a matter of icy fact—provide the excuse for putting Soviet biologist Zhores A. Medvedev into a mental hospital last year after Professor Medvedev had gained world renown for his political dissent. More recently, Vladimir Bukovsky, a philologist, has come forward with evidence of having undergone similarly outrageous treatment.

The misuse of psychiatric personnel and institutions to incarcerate political heretics has a long history in Russia. It is one of the instruments open to a totalitarian regime with a medical system in which the loyalty of physicians belongs primarily to their governmental employer rather than to their patients.

Mr. Medvedev did not stay in an insane asylum very long because his imprisonment brought international protest, plus courageous representations from some of the Soviet Union's own most distinguished scientists. But other Soviet dissenters—more obscure figures without highly placed scientists as friends—remain prisoners in these institutions, often subjected to regimens intended to drive them insane, thus post facto justifying their incarceration.

At the very least, Moscow's flagrant abuse of this branch of medicine calls for protest by psychiatrists in all free countries. Such action was actually initiated recently by British psychiatrists at Sheffield University. To the degree that Soviet psychiatry has been perverted into an instrument of political repression, it has lost all standing in the outside world.

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