

CORRESPONDENCE

THE ST AUGUSTINE'S HOSPITAL REPORT

DEAR SIR,

Dr Rollin is well known for his wistful memories of the good old days when Medical Superintendents solved all problems. Perhaps his comments on the Report on St Augustine's Hospital, (*News and Notes*, September, p 14) should be read with this in mind.

On re-reading the Report, I could not find any evidence that the Committee's Report 'applauded' the demise of the old hierarchical system of management—indeed, the Report pointed out the difficulties the changes to a new system had caused. Similarly, I could find no evidence to support Dr Rollin's remarks about 'the current trendy pieties, including presumably the all-pervading hollow first name camaraderies, and the phoney egalitarianism'. Dr Rollin is hardly in a position to talk about flights of fantasy, and I suggest that those who are interested should read the Report for themselves.

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THE ABUSE OF PSYCHIATRY AND MR PLYUSHCH

DEAR SIR,

On the first page of *News and Notes* for September and evidently at the request of the Council of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, there is an account of an interview conducted by 'three senior Fellows of the College' with a Russian mathematician, Mr Leonid Plyushch. Any layman reading this account might suppose that it is an authoritative and generally acceptable opinion, and I write to express my serious doubt about the value of the article and of any opinion which can be inferred from it.

From the outset, it seems to be assumed that Mr Plyushch has no mental illness. He was asked 'what could best be done to help people in a similar situation to that which he encountered'. Many paranoid patients would have a ready answer to such a question. Mr Plyushch's answer is that three years before his arrest, a friend was told '“Your friend who has schizophrenia is in need of treatment in hospital.” The best thing was for news of such events to be sent to the West and quickly brought out in the open.'

Mr Plyushch states that he had 'two psychiatric examinations . . . both were harsh, but [one] was an

easier and better examination and more thorough'. Do we accept that a patient can give an objective account of an examination to which he has been submitted, or estimate its thoroughness? Do we imagine that no patient ever regards our examinations as harsh?

The account becomes increasingly critical—but possibly also more paranoid—'Generally, all nurses and doctors went along with the system, believing that if you dissented you must be mad. All their orders came from the K.G.B.'

The article concludes with the following sentence: 'The meeting was not intended to be a medical examination, but the Fellows who met Mr Plyushch saw no indication of schizophrenia or other mental illness'. Did the Fellows feel able to exclude formal thought disorder (the interview was conducted through an interpreter)? Would they agree that the criteria for the diagnosis of schizophrenia differs from one country to another, even though they may share a common language?

There are very many doctors who regret that medicine should involve itself in politics, and many have serious doubts about the increasing tendency of the College to comment on matters which have a strong political bias. It may be proper to draw attention to obvious and gross misuse of medicine by political organizations: but such cases must be more carefully examined and documented than appears to have been done on this occasion.

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DEAR SIR,

It is surely right that the abuse of psychiatry for political ends should be condemned wherever it occurs, but it is hard to see what purpose was served by publishing the interview with Mr Leonid Plyushch.

What is the point of selecting three eminent and anonymous Fellows of the College to interview but not examine Mr Plyushch? At best if they had examined him they could provide evidence that Mr Plyushch is not suffering from illness at present. If he is not ill at present it is possible that he never was ill; or that his illness has undergone spontaneous remission; or that he has been cured by the system of treatment which he now condemns. It is impossible to say whether or not he was ill unless he was examined at the time of alleged illness.

In an issue of *News and Notes* which also includes