

No Shocks – Western Disease Strikes East

By CARL BERNSTEIN

A 26-year old intern from Montana saved a Manhattan man today from severe electro-shock treatment in a New York hospital. The therapy, which could have permanently short-circuited the patient's entire nervous system, had been ordered by the chief psychiatrist of the Hospital For Separate And Joint Diseases after all other treatments had failed.

The patient, a minor cog in the wheels of a large foreign investment bank, had been rushed to the hospital by administrators of the company's Employee Assistance Program after he had been "acting strangely in the office."

Reporters' inquiries as to what had led the company to commit a heretofore-sane employee to a locked psych ward, were referred to the bank's legal department. A spokesman, Shyster Avocado, issued the following statement:

"Von Stutterheim had previously been a relatively stable employee of the brokerage division (that is, 'stable', in the context of anyone in that profession), when he suddenly underwent a drastic and frightening change: About the 4th of May his face distorted into a permanent wide grin, and his eyes assumed a glassy, far-away look. He seemed increasingly disconnected from his environment and would reply to colleagues' greetings with nonsensical phrases like '20 days,' '19 days,' '18 days,' etc.

"Client complaints suddenly poured in, to the effect that he seemed completely insensitive to their concerns, and had answered their lamentations that they had lost money in technology stocks by saying: 'Who cares? Get real! Just sell the stock if you don't like it and buy a horse with what's left.' Clearly, the company had to act, so we sent him to a nearby hospital for observation and treatment."

According to the chief psychiatrist at Joint Hospital, Dr. Felix Frankenfurter, the patient appeared to be in a pathological state of ecstatic bliss. "We tried to shake him out of it, but nothing worked. We read him stories of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, gave him newspapers from the crash of 1929, even showed him TV newscasts of voting results in Florida - all with-



Patient about to undergo electroshock

out the slightest effect. He just continued to grin and babble incoherently.

"He kept talking about riding with some bandit or outlaw, and the name 'Bob' featured prominently in his ravings, but whether 'Bob' was the name of that bandit or some other person remained unclear. Also, he kept singing the same three songs over and over: 'Back in the Saddle Again,' 'Give Me Land,' and some other song about logic or philosophy, which according to him 'explained everything.' And he kept repeating a story about buying a hat, and a tourist mistaking him for a native. It appeared obvious that the patient was a hopeless case, that his mind was gone for good, and that electro-shock would at least quiet him down permanently."

As von Stutterheim was strapped to the table and electrodes attached to his temples, the young intern, Buck A. Rue, happened to walk by and inquired about the procedure. When he was told what the patient's symptoms were, he burst out laughing.

"This man has not lost his mind," he said, "at least not in the conventional sense. His condition is very common where I grew up. It's called 'Euphoric Bobitis' or *Delirium Marshallictus*; it's an extreme form of Bobitis that occurs regularly in Bobitis patients when they get close to traveling to The Bob. It typically starts about three weeks before departure and works itself into a frenzy. The inflicted is unable to concentrate or perform anything other than the most basic bodily functions - for all extent and purposes his mind has already traveled ahead of him into The Bob."

He explained that "The Bob" refers to an area of inaccessible, raw land in the

West, roughly a million acres, which is devoid of all amenities, and which is, therefore, wisely shunned by sane visitors, and that "Bobitis" is an incurable disease which robs its sufferers of free will and, instead, creates in them a haunting obsession with The Bob. After examining the patient Dr. Rue said that "Bandit" was simply the name of the patient's horse, apparently an extraordinary animal. "The song about philosophy is called

'Cowboy Logic' and is one of the most requested western songs around the campfire. It contains an important riddle, which I am not at liberty to reveal. The 'hat story' appears to be part of the local folklore of Woodworth Meadow, a beautiful mountain valley adjacent to The Bob."

"While this is a severe case of Bobitis, it's far from the only one I've seen; they're a frequent occurrence in Missoula where I went to medical school, although I've never heard of a case this far east. When did you say he was leaving for Montana?"

Being told that the departure date was May 24th, Dr. Rue confidently predicted that by the end of the month von Stutterheim would appear almost normal again. "Right now," he stated, "his psyche just cannot handle that he is literally less than two weeks away from traveling towards The Bob."

"The only thing you have to watch for now," he continued, "is that such extreme cases are often contagious during the delirium stage. At this point the afflicted appears so happy that other people sometimes become jealous and try to find the recipe for that happiness, sort of like the scene in the delicatessen from the movie *When Harry Met Sally*. He should be kept away from susceptible individuals who are currently wondering about the meaning of life."

Indeed, von Stutterheim's immediate manager, Jones B. Dow, confirmed that two employees of the bank had made inquiries about pack trips after having been seduced by von Stutterheim's ecstatic ravings earlier in the year. Fortunately for them, in both instances, their teenage children saved them by vetoing the trip.