

PSYCHOLOGY

How to spot Hijackers

AN ingenious Greek once approached Dionysius, the much hated tyrant of Syracuse, with the proposition that Dionysius should publicly award him 50 gold talents, and let it be known that this was because he, Dionysius, had learnt of the Greek an infallible method of detecting would-be assassins. Dionysius, it is said, thought well of the plan, and when the present wave of hijacking first began, it must have occurred to many airline companies that there would be little to lose by trying a similar confidence trick. Now there is no need. A real and apparently effective system of detecting likely hijackers, in part by their behavioural traits, has been developed by Dr John T. Dailey, a psychologist with the Federal Aviation Administration in Washington.

Since field trials started 18 months ago, several dozen people picked out by the screening programme have been found to be carrying either guns or narcotics. Eastern Airlines, which has had most experience with the system, believes that it has had valuable results. The company used to suffer about a third of all hijackings in the world, or a half of the United States' total; so far this year it has had only a single aircraft hijacked. Dr Dailey modestly says that the effectiveness of the system is hard to prove since many factors affect hijacking rates; he believes, nevertheless, that it presents substantial obstacles to would-be hijackers. It is significant that in the United States, where 13 airlines now use the system, the rate of hijackings has been on the decline whereas in the rest of the world it continues unabated.

One of the reasons for the apparent success of the system may be that it is based on positive rather than negative vetting. As each passenger approaches the boarding area he is scrutinized for certain behavioural traits. Armed with this and "any other information" about the subject—presumably what can be gleaned from his passport and the appearance of his baggage—the operators of the test are able to give positive clearance to about 99.5 per cent of the passengers, without holding them up at all. The remaining 0.5 per cent are asked to walk past an array of magnetometers to see how much metal they are carrying. This second test generally clears about half of the suspects, the remainder of whom are interviewed. Those to whom positive clearance can still not be given are searched and even if nothing is found may be refused permission to board the aircraft.

The system is not claimed to be foolproof, but many airlines have expressed interest in it. The only carrier outside the United States to have installed the system is a Japanese airline. Since behavioural tests were devised on Americans, they have to be restructured for other nationalities as appropriate. Dr Dailey explains that in devising the test the object was to look for traits that discriminate between the ordinary traveller and the hijacker. Nervousness, for example, is not such a trait, since many people are apprehensive of flying and some hijackers exhibit perfect sangfroid. Dr Dailey, now chief of psychology at the FAA's Office of Aviation Medicine, has worked for ten years with the Air Force on studying various aspects of motivation and developing tests to measure them.

CONSUMERISM

Voids in Cereals and Teeth

If Kellogg's Rice Krispies, General Foods Post Toasties, Ralston Purina Sugar Frosted Chex, Quaker Oats, Shredded Wheat or 20 other cereals feature on your breakfast menu, you are starting the day on a non-nutritious plate of "empty calories". This was the message, flatly denied by the food companies concerned, that Mr Robert Choate delivered last month to a Senate subcommittee on consumer affairs.

Mr Choate, an independent nutrition consultant who used to work with the White House, based his evidence on an analysis of eight nutrients (protein, calcium, iron and vitamins A, B₁, B₂, C and D) that the cereal companies boast are contained in their products. About 10 of the 60 cereals on the market contain substantial quantities of these nutrients, but the remainder have little or none. The crux of Mr Choate's testimony before the Senate subcommittee was that the cereal companies dispose of their vast advertising budget (a total of \$42 million a year) so that "the worst cereals are huckstered to children". The chairman of the subcommittee, Senator Frank E. Moss, urged American mothers to take heed that no longer could they "blithely send their children off to school after serving them a bowl of their favourite cereal, confident that they are full of nutritious body-building food".

For the benefit of anxious mothers and others, Mr Choate had prepared a chart displaying the nutritional value of the 60 cereals. Each cereal was scored on its aggregate of percentage points for each nutrient, 100 per cent being the "typical person's" total daily need of the nutrient in question. On this basis, out of a minimum total of 700 points for seven nutrients (vitamins B₁ and B₂ are scored together out of 100) the cereal known as Kellogg's Product 19 scores some 710 points whereas Nabisco Shredded Wheat chalks up a mere 12, and 40 of the 60 cereals merit less than 100 points. Each of the five best sellers—Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Kellogg's Rice Krispies, Kellogg's Sugar Frosted Flakes, General Mills's Cheerios and General Mills's Wheaties—score less than 50.

A statement released by the General Foods Corporation says that Mr Choate "has made a great many technical errors in his statement, and he has made a number of wrong assumptions about the food industry and food marketing". The company is not yet ready to reveal what the technical errors may be, but it holds that Mr Choate has ignored the fact that "you cannot force a youngster to eat a breakfast food he does not like, no matter how loaded it might be with nutrients".

Be this as it may, Senator Moss has said that his committee will launch an investigation into the advertising practices of the industry and the policies of the regulatory agencies concerned. Meanwhile the consumerists' axe has descended elsewhere amid the ranks of the industrialists, this time in the form of a report prepared by the National Academy of Sciences on the effectiveness of various brands of toothpaste in preventing dental decay. The report, released by the Food and Drug Administration, found that eight toothpastes were ineffective in preventing decay, and their advertising must be changed accordingly. The eight brands are Brisk Activated Tooth Paste, Colgate Chlorophyll Tooth Paste with Gardol, Colgate Dental Cream with Gardol, Antizyme Tooth Paste, Kolynos