

HUMAN RIGHTS

ALERT

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A Psychiatric Survival Broadsheet



SUDBURY
Special Report:
Inquest into the death of
Kimberly Rogers
opens Oct. 15, 2002

It was on August 9, 2001 that 40-year old Kimberly Rogers was found dead in her Sudbury, Ont. apartment. Ms. Rogers had been convicted of 'welfare fraud' (read: unauthorized fiscal survival-related activities) for taking out a student loan and completing a university degree while in receipt of social assistance.

The horrifying irony is that her actions would have been entirely legal just a year or so earlier, before Mike Harris and Co. took over the reins in Ontario and virtually destroyed the province's social infrastructure.

Among the changes made to social assistance by the Tories under Harris, in 1996 any kind of loan was redefined as 'income' and deemed to be deductible from a person's welfare eligibility. (Someone should remind these people that loans are repayable - with interest - and can hardly be considered a personal financial gain).

Another particularly draconian change made by this government beginning in April 2000 is that a single conviction for 'welfare fraud' (no matter how small the amount) now results in someone being permanently banned

from receiving social assistance in Ontario. This is the situation that Kimberly Rogers was facing when she received a sentence of six months' house arrest on April 25, 2001.

Ms. Rogers launched a constitutional challenge to the suspension of benefits, and in late May 2001 won an initial victory when she was granted interim assistance pending the outcome of her appeal.

Unfortunately, she would not survive to continue the fight, as her term of house arrest would eventually prove to be a death sentence.



Sudbury, Ontario October 2001

In the first ten days of August 2001, much of the province was gripped by an almost unprecedented heat wave that saw temperatures climb as high as thirty-eight degrees Celsius (101F.) in many parts of southern and central Ontario. Ms. Rogers was in the final stage of pregnancy at this point of her confinement, and she had been taking the antidepressant amitriptyline (Elavil). Many of these antidepressant drugs are known to sharply increase

the risk of heat-related illnesses.

Under the terms of her sentence, she was only permitted to leave her apartment for three hours a week (on Wednesday mornings) to tend to essential business such as medical or legal appointments.

Workers from the Elizabeth Fry Society and the local Social Planning Council were visiting periodically to check on her well-being and to bring a few groceries, but the bottom line is that she was trapped around the clock in a sweltering apartment with no legal means of seeking relief from the heat.

This incident typifies the manner in which the Tory government has responded to victims of the very events this regime has set in motion. Women in particular are suffering under a system which criminalizes and persecutes poor and vulnerable citizens.

The initial testimony at the inquest focused on the supposed fact that Ms. Rogers had filled numerous prescriptions for Elavil, and may have accumulated a sizable stockpile of the drug.

While this information could easily wind up being used against her, one must wonder why it is so easy (especially in this era of scurrilous 'wars against drugs') to obtain such large quantities of the chemical substances that are traditionally prescribed for so-called 'mental illnesses.'

No other classes of prescription medication are handed out virtually for

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the asking like this, or without anything even resembling responsible medical follow-up. It is obvious that in such cases the drugs are serving to stifle the cries of desperate people, in order that the government or medical profession can ignore the real issues that affect such peoples' quality of life.

It boggles the mind that the Province appears able to afford provision of these expensive drugs virtually on demand, yet was apparently unable (or unwilling) to ensure that this expectant mother was able to get enough to eat, or to have a decent place to live. The medical profession itself has turned out to have been a willing accessory to this tragedy.

While Ms. Rogers' benefits had been at least temporarily re-instated, her monthly welfare allotment of \$520 (less the regular deduction of \$52 towards the overpayment) barely covered her rent of \$450 per month, leaving her with just \$18 to cover all of her other needs. The father of her unborn child had made a one-time payment of \$300 but was refusing to offer any additional support.

**Survivor News In Brief:
Summer 2002**

TORONTO

**'Mad Memorial'
marks Bastille Day**

The ninth annual Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day was marked in Toronto by a small but spirited march from a west-end library to the grounds of the Centre for Addiction & Mental Health, followed by a historical walking tour of the grounds and a sombre memorial for the dead.

The psychiatric survivor movement has embraced Bastille Day (July 14) as a liberation holiday, in memory of the French revolutionaries who stormed the infamous Bastille Prison, freeing a number of confined 'lunatics' along with the rest of the prison population.

The original Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day (inspired by the celebrations of lesbian/gay pride that happen in many larger cities) was held in Toronto on September 18, 1993. Beginning in July 2000, 'Mad Pride' events have taken place in Canada and the U.S.

along with a number of other countries. (This year in addition to Toronto, events took place in Vancouver (Canada), Eugene (Oregon, USA), England, France, Germany and Italy).

For the third year running, the educational walk was facilitated by survivor historian Dr. Geoff Reaume. As darkness fell, people (about fifty in all) gathered near the wall at the western boundary of the grounds. Candles were lit and a number of white paper tombstones bearing more than 190 names were displayed. These names (spanning a period of more than a century) were then read aloud, one by one.



**BREAKING NEWS - USA
New law may require that names
of all persons with a psych.
label be reported to U.S.
Attorney General**

New legislation that would require the forwarding of names of all United States residents with a psychiatric label or history of involuntary 'treatment' (inpatient or outpatient) to the U.S. Attorney General has cleared the House of Representatives.

The bizarrely named Our Lady of Peace Act, sponsored by Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY) and Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) would authorize up to \$1 billion dollars to the states for the collection of personal information on all persons with a psychiatric diagnosis, to be forwarded to the Federal government.

It hardly requires saying what the consequences for innocent people are apt to be if this bill passes. In the wake of events on September 11, 2001, the U.S. Attorney General's office has assumed numerous dictatorial powers with John Ashcroft at the helm. Since last autumn a relentless witch hunt has targeted marginalized communities throughout the U.S., with many hundreds finding themselves being imprisoned for indefinite periods without trial

or even having been charged with an offense. The passage of this legislation will potentially add millions of names to this database of targets for persecution.

It appears that the Bush administration is eager to rush this legislation through to final passage, pretty much as it has done with any number of other recent bills related to social control or the suppression of dissent. No Congressional hearings have been scheduled for this legislation and the standard review by the Senate Judiciary Committee has apparently been bypassed.

It isn't hard to figure out that even within this broad miasma of questionable information-gathering, specific individuals and groups will find themselves being targeted for follow-up action as this information is received. Given the racism and religious intolerance that is sweeping the United States, it can be assumed this bill will provide yet another mechanism for targeting those people who the administration dislikes.

It can also be assumed that particular attention will be paid to those individuals who are not considered 'treatment-compliant' or whose current situation has been flagged by a shrink as being probable cause for 'concern'.

'Family advocacy' groups such as NAMI and the Treatment Advocacy Center have long lobbied for Federal legislation that would bring their bothersome relatives to heel on a national scale. Now, thanks to the 'war on terrorism', they appear poised to receive their wishes - in spades.

FROM THE EDITOR:

Apologies are given for the extended period of time between issues. From this point on I will be attempting to adhere to a quarterly (As opposed to monthly) publication schedule.

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**CONTRIBUTIONS ARE
WELCOME!**

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