

# HUMAN

# RIGHTS

# ALERT

November 16, 2000

ISSUE # 13

A Psychiatric Survival Broadsheet



## Cops charged in death of Otto Vass

Four Toronto police constables are now facing manslaughter charges in the wake of the apparent beating death of 55-year old Otto Vass outside a west-end convenience store on the early morning of August 9.

The four cops - Rob Lemaitre, Phil Duncan, Nam Le and Felipo Bevilacqua - turned themselves in at the headquarters of the Special Investigations Unit on October 25. They were released following a brief court appearance at Toronto's Old City Hall.

Many questions have since arisen about the circumstances of their release, and about the behavior of their fellow officers during and immediately following this court appearance.

### Own Recognizance

These four cops were released on their own recognizance, under condition that they surrender their passports, not possess weapons or function in their capacity as police officers pending resolution of the case. (They continue to receive their pay from the Toronto Police Service and until the case is resolved will likely be functioning in an administrative capacity).

Just about anyone else facing similar charges would find themselves sitting in jail until trial, or at least would be subject to extremely high bail.

During the appearance the court was packed with both uniformed and plain-clothes police, who crowded out and generally intimidated civilians who wished to view the proceedings. Media personnel who attempted to take pictures of the four accused as they left found themselves facing a wall of cops, and were subjected to physical and verbal abuse.



Otto Vass

## Cops, psych. nurses to team up in 'pilot project'

Plainclothes cops will now be accompanied by 'mental health' nurses on calls involving 'emotionally disturbed' persons, in a two-year pilot project being launched in Toronto's 51 Division.

According to the Police Services Board, about 2,800 apprehensions under the Mental Health Act now occur each year in Toronto. If this new program spreads throughout the city this number can be expected to skyrocket, especially with the changes to mental health legislation scheduled to come into effect later this year.

As it now stands, a nurse or other 'mental health' worker (other than a psychiatrist) has no power to act on their own in situations involving suspected 'mentally ill' persons in the community. However, if they are accompanied by the police, they can direct such things as having someone's personal premises entered over their objections, or to have them

taken into custody. (Ordinarily the police require a valid search or arrest warrant to enter private property uninvited, except where they have 'probable cause' to believe that an offense is taking place or that an 'emergency situation' exists. It is likely that this program plans to regularly avail itself of this latter wrinkle in the law).

### ACT/PACT teams

With 'Brian's Law' due for proclamation in December, and the Government of Ontario putting dozens of 'Assertive Community Treatment' teams in place, this represents the latest attempt to enforce total control over the lives of innocent persons who have had the misfortune to have acquired a psychiatric label.

Many cops have expressed misgiving over a requirement in the new Mental Health Act that they remain with anyone they apprehend until the appropriate 'mental health professionals' are able to take over custody.

With such 'professionals' now actually joining police on their beat, this particular barrier to the enforcement of 'Brian's Law' appears to have disappeared. The outcome is guaranteed to be a human rights nightmare.

In the first ten days of this project this single team has 'treated' fifteen people. If this figure remains consistent it will work out to an average of over 500 contacts per year - in a single downtown precinct.

**Similar programs are already in place in the Canadian cities of Hamilton, Ont., and Vancouver, B.C. In the city of Victoria, B.C., the mental health 'crisis teams' are also accompanied by the cops on some of the more than 300 calls they make each month.**

**SURVIVORS' RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!**

**Ont. government shows a double standard on drugs**

It appears that the Harris Tories don't know what message they wish to transmit to the public when it comes to the use of mood-altering chemicals. However, the latest announcement from the Ministry of Community and Social Services has as its core principles the same things as 'Brian's Law' - namely, coercion and social control.

Yesterday, the Tories announced plans to proceed with the implementation of mandatory drug testing of all welfare recipients/applicants, with compulsory treatment for anyone who tests positive imposed as a condition for continued receipt of benefits.

**Death Sentence**

Social Services Minister John Baird insists the object of the new policy is to 'save lives' and that it isn't intended to be punitive. However, given that the price of noncompliance with either testing or 'treatment' is loss of income support and the likely additional consequence of homelessness, the outcome for some people could be a potential death sentence.

This same mixed message has resulted in the imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of people in the U.S. and Canada under the pretext of waging a 'war on drugs', and the incarceration and forced 'treatment' of countless others using other forms of mood-altering substances.

The reality is, many of the chemicals routinely administered to psychiatric 'patients' (often over their clear objections) are even more addictive and damaging than their 'illicit' counterparts.

Ultimately, both the 'war on drugs' and the forced drugging of persons who have been diagnosed as 'mentally ill' amount to manifestations of the same social phenomena - specifically a 'war on the poor.'

Whether it involves persecuting one sector of society for involvement with 'illicit' drugs, or legally forcing supposedly 'safe and effective' psychiatric drugs on still others, the underlying motivation is essentially the same - specifically, the deliberate suppression of a class of people.



**Demonstrate!**

**Wed, Nov. 15th at Noon**

**1001 Queen West @ Ossington, (quick ride south from Ossington Stn)**

**For more information, call 535 8501, ext. 2018**

Close to fifty survivors of ECT and their supporters gathered outside the Queen Street Mental Health Centre on November 15, to protest the increasing use of one of psychiatry's more archaic and barbaric 'treatments'.

The demonstration was organized by members of the Queen Street Patient's Council, with support from the No Force! Coalition and members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

ECT, or electroconvulsive 'therapy', has seen a resurgence in recent years (especially targeting elderly women) and is still touted by some psychiatrists as being the 'treatment of choice' for what gets called 'major depression.'

The procedure, which involves shooting an electrical current of 130 to 175 volts through someone's brain for a period of two-tenths of a second to two seconds in order to induce a seizure, is known to result almost invariably in some degree of brain damage, and mild to catastrophic permanent memory loss.

The procedure 'works' in much the same manner as does any other traumatic head injury, by inducing a temporary state of euphoria, and forgetfulness of whatever was resulting in emotional turmoil in the first place.

Some persons who have been given ECT report losing literally years of their lives. Shock survivor Wendy Funk (in her outstanding book 'What Difference does it

Make? Journey of a Soul Survivor') describes literally having the first thirty years of her life wiped out by more than forty shock treatments, and of having to subsequently rediscover herself from scratch.

During the rally many compelling first-hand tales of incarceration, forced drugging and shock were shared by nearly a dozen different speakers. A huge paper banner which said 'This place has been zapping brains since the 1950's' was briefly displayed before it succumbed to the sharp November wind.

Upcoming events in the Psychiatric Survivor community include a public forum on 'Brian's Law' at 7 PM on Nov. 22 at the 519 Church St. Community Centre, featuring speakers Anita Szigeti, Lana Frado and Don Weitz. A second major demonstration is being planned for the Ontario Legislature, at noon on the date Bill 68 is actually proclaimed (December 1, 2000).



**No to community treatment orders!**

Bill 68 or 'Brian's Law' will make it much easier to deprive innocent persons of their liberty on the basis of unscientific, value judgment-based psychiatric 'diagnoses.' It will also extend the influence of coercive psychiatry directly into peoples' homes by establishing forced outpatient 'treatment' as a condition for discharge from an institution.

**THIS IS A BLATANT VIOLATION OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.**

**DEMONSTRATE**

**The day 'Brian's Law' is proclaimed Friday, December 1 @12:00 noon Queen's Park**

For more information call 535-8501 x2018

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A project of the No Force! Coalition

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**Contributions welcome!**

**(Contributions may be edited for space)**

