

# HUMAN RIGHTS



# ALERT

May 25, 2001

ISSUE #15

A Psychiatric Survival Broadsheet

## **Globalization now extending to 'mental health' policy development**

The trend towards greater coercion by psychiatry has been gaining momentum over the past few years, with many jurisdictions in the United States, Canada and elsewhere enacting laws providing for forced outpatient drugging and the easing of guidelines for involuntary committal to institutions.

A more recent, and extremely chilling development in this trend is the apparent involvement of the World Bank in the development of a global template for 'mental health service' delivery.

The body actually developing this 'template' is the International Consortium for Mental Health Policy and Services, an initiative which is supported by the Global Forum for Health Research, and the Governments of Australia, United Kingdom and The United States of America - and partially funded by the World Bank.

The chair of International Consortium for Mental Health Policy and Services is Harvey Whiteford, the former mental health specialist at the World Bank. The current mental health specialist at the World Bank, Florence Baingana, is the vice chair of International Consortium for Mental Health Policy and Services.

Given the overwhelming influence these global trade bodies are gaining over public policy through the agree-

ments they secretly negotiate (such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, the General Agreement on Trade in Services, and the pending Free Trade Area of the Americas) this is an alarming development that could see the spread of western-style, coercive psychiatric practices to the furthest reaches of the world. Cultural annihilation of entire societies, the pathologizing of all forms of political dissent and a global pandemic of disabling neurological disorders resulting from the common psychiatric 'treatments' are among the possible outcomes of any such approach.



Anti-FTAA demonstration  
Quebec City, Canada, April 2001

Agreements of this kind give private corporate interests tremendous influence over public policy matters, even giving big business the power to successfully sue governments for attempting to enforce legal standards such as those protecting the environment or workers' rights.

It is very easy to envision this kind of influence spreading to all facets of health care delivery owing to the

enormous profit potential involved, and especially the 'mental health' industry due to the role it already plays in social control.

A potential for hope in this situation lies in the powerful anti-globalization movement which has evolved over the past few years, and which has succeeded repeatedly in seriously disrupting proceedings of these international trade bodies. This was most recently seen in the extraordinary resistance mounted to the Summit of the Americas meeting in Quebec City last month.

It is necessary to start bringing psychiatric survivors together with all facets of the activist community in order to combat these widespread human rights abuses. The youthful, dynamic movement against corporate globalization may well prove to be an invaluable ally in this struggle.

**(Note: The World Bank has cancelled a planned conference in Barcelona, Spain that it had scheduled for June, owing to the 'threat of demonstrations'.)**

## **Apologies**

Personal and technical problems have resulted in a four-month gap between issues.

In addition to this issue I am hoping to put out a special Pride Week edition in late June or early July.

**SURVIVORS' RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!**

## HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT - PAGE TWO

### **Use of forced ECT continues - but so does the resistance!**

A number of recent incidents of forced electroshock 'treatment' in the United States highlight just how far the psychiatric industry is prepared to go in order to force its destructive interventions upon unwilling individuals.

66-year old Kathleen Garrett\* was a patient in DesPeres Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri in August 2000 when she was subjected to electroconvulsive 'therapy' against her clearly stated wishes. By the time public attention had been drawn to her situation she had already been shocked twice, and the hospital was planning a series of ten to twelve more of these damaging 'treatments.'

### **Public outrage**

In a campaign launched by Support Coalition International at the initiative of antishock activist Juli Lawrence, the hospital was flooded with outraged messages from members of the public. As a result of this concerted public action, the forced ECT order was rescinded and Kathleen was subsequently discharged from the hospital. (In an apparent act of sheer petulance, the hospital 'zapped' her again immediately before releasing her).

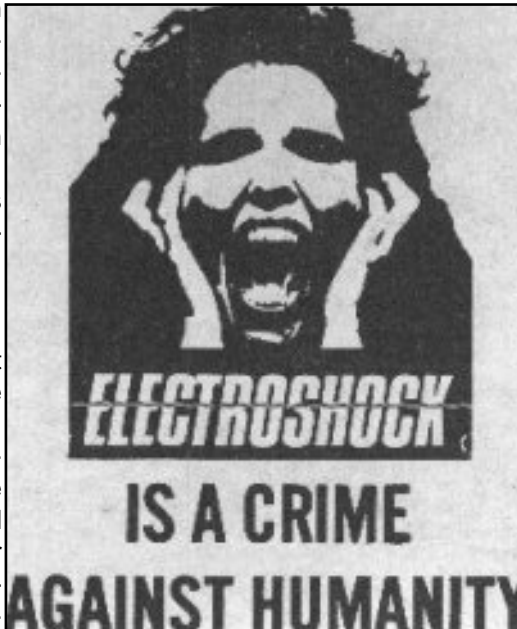
Two ongoing cases at the Pilgrim State Psychiatric Hospital in Brentwood, NY (on Long Island) have also been the focus of a great deal of public and media attention.

Twenty-five year old Adam Szyszko was involuntarily committed to this institution last year after being diagnosed with 'schizophrenia.' The hospital opted to pursue a course of electroshock when it turned out that Adam was severely allergic to the group of drugs commonly utilized when this 'diagnosis' is made.

In NY State informed consent is required for ECT, but due to Adam having been declared incompetent to make treatment decisions for himself, the hospital was in a position to seek consent from a third party such as a

spouse, parent or other family member - or through a court order. Since Adam's family was opposed to the treatments, the institution decided to go the judicial route. After a hearing in November 2000, the State Supreme Court authorized a course of up to twenty shocks.

The family subsequently obtained a stay of the court order but not before Adam had already been shocked twice.



Forty-nine year old Paul Henri Thomas had been subjected to more than sixty forced electroshocks during a two-year incarceration at Pilgrim. On April 20 this year, the court authorized up to 40 more treatments.

The order was initially postponed until April 25, and subsequent to that date a full stay of the order was issued. The appeals for both Adam Szyszko and Paul Henri Thomas will be heard on June 26, 2001 - which is, coincidentally, the United Nations International Day for the Support of Victims of Torture.

A human rights activist in his native Haiti, Paul Henri Thomas has been outspoken against this form of legal medical abuse and the false 'diagnoses' which are wielded as justification for its use - a political position which in itself has resulted in him being labeled 'delusional' and thus

supposedly in need of this brain-busting intervention.

These cases of forced electroshock have galvanized public opinion around an issue which has previously drawn little attention. (many people actually believed that electroshock 'therapy' was abolished years ago!) In addition to the pending appeals of Paul and Adam's cases, the New York State Assembly convened an inquiry into the involuntary use of ECT on May 18. A protest in NYC organized by talk show host Dr. Gary Null drew more than 430 people on May 21. Members of the NY State Assembly and administration of Pilgrim State Hospital have been deluged with letters from psychiatric survivors and human rights advocates from around the world.

*\* More than 70 per cent of the victims of ECT are women, with the fastest-growing group being women over the age of sixty-five.*



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[psychepride@yahoo.com](mailto:psychepride@yahoo.com)  
(416) 531-2411 x401

**HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT**  
**319 Dundas St. E. #408**  
**Toronto, Ontario M5A 2A2**  
**Fax: (416) 368-5984**  
**E-mail:**

[human.rights.alert@3web.net](mailto:human.rights.alert@3web.net)

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