

HUMAN RIGHTS



ALERT

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A Psychiatric Survival Broadsheet

USA

Psychiatry Exploits Sept. 11 Aftermath

It was at about 8:45 on the morning of September 11, 2001 when the world's social, economic and political climate underwent a fundamental change. Two hijacked jumbo jets plowed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre about eighteen minutes apart, sending these colossal buildings crashing to earth and killing some 3,000 people as the streets of Manhattan filled with a choking maelstrom of dust and smoke. A third airplane crashed into the west wing of the Pentagon, while still another plummeted into a field in Pennsylvania.

Tremendous Loss

Needless to say, a great many people were traumatized by these events. Aside from the tremendous loss felt by the families of the victims, many peoples' sense of security and safety was shattered. The outcome has been an all-pervading sense of anxiety.

The most disturbing development in the wake of these events is how swiftly governments have acted to impose highly restrictive and undemocratic measures on their populations under the auspices of 'combating terrorism.' Playing on peoples' understandable fears and invoking an intense, frighteningly bellicose brand of nationalism, the government of the United States moved with alarming speed to substantially restrict personal privacy and basic liberties through something called the 'Patriot Act.' Similar legislation was passed in Canada, Britain and a number of other countries within three months of the

events of September 11.

Within four weeks of the attacks, the U.S. military had launched into what promises to be a prolonged and tremendously costly (both financially and in terms of lives lost) 'war on terrorism' with the saturation bombing and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan. The outcome at home? Still more uncertainty and anxiety, along with further rights restrictions and an endless torrent of dollars being re-routed from vital human resources into the military's cavernous maw.



Throughout the U.S. and Canada, young men of Middle Eastern background have become the focus of a relentless witch hunt by the FBI and other Federal government agencies. The same racist backlash (which never seems to be far beneath the surface in the United States) has resulted in a flood of hate-motivated attacks on mosques, temples and against individuals of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin, sowing widespread terror within these communities.

The 'mental health' industry has been almost as quick as most governments to exploit the human consequences of this tragedy and the subsequent events. The American Psychiatric Association's website <www.psych.org> now contains dozens of position papers and 'advice columns' directly related to the aftermath of Sept. 11.

While some of this material may appear superficially to be benevolent and common-sense, the medical model orientation of much of this content is revealed glaringly in the section titled 'disaster psychiatry'. This series of presentations seeks to pathologize the perfectly natural reactions people experience in the face of disaster, with the bottom line invariably being strongly worded advice to 'seek professional treatment.' (Translation: if you don't, we might just decide to take away your choice in the matter! - ed.)

The pharmaceutical companies have also undoubtedly seen a dramatic increase in their revenues during the same period, due to the evil symbiosis that currently exists between these two powerful interests.

Now more than ever it is imperative that communities pull together and support one another in order to get safely through this period of gnawing uncertainty, much of which has actually arisen out of governments' responses to this terrible but isolated incident. The divisive attitudes of racism, suspicion and warmongering need to be overcome, in order that people can heal together without psychiatric meddling, and hopefully find the strength they need to deal with their common oppressors - be these governments, corporations or the institutions which sustain them. Only then can we hope for a world which is free from terrorism, be it the work of individuals - or state-sanctioned.

SURVIVORS' RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!

The Tory Psychiatric Police State - A Few "Mental Health" Facts

by **Don Weitz**
for **People Against Coercive Treatment**

(This is the text of a flyer which was distributed at the Ontario Common Front's demonstrations outside the Tory leadership convention, Toronto, March 22-23, 2002)

1. In 1995, the Harris Tories killed the Advocacy Commission, which would have provided individual and systemic advocacy for psychiatric prisoners, developmentally disabled and elderly citizens in institutions. There are a few psychiatric patient advocates in the provincial psychiatric hospitals - none in general hospitals and other institutions.

2. In June 2000, the Harris Tory government passed its fascistic "mental health law" deceptively titled "Brian's Law" or Bill 68; it was proclaimed on December 1, 2000.

3. Bill 68 targets and criminalizes thousands of citizens labelled "seriously mentally ill", "psychotic" or "schizophrenic".

4. Bill 68 re-traumatizes and re-stigmatizes vulnerable people.

5. Bill 68, the Health Care Consent Act and Substitute Decisions Act perpetuate the common myth/stereotype of the "violent mental patient" and promote psychiatry's medical model.

6. Studies show that only 4% of violent crimes are committed by "mentally ill" citizens - 96% by "sane" or "normal" citizens.

7. Bill 68 makes it easier to lock up innocent and vulnerable citizens.

8. Under Bill 68, a "community treatment order" (CTO) can be imposed on any citizen who has been treated in a "mental health facility" for at least 30 days or twice within the last three years. This includes those admitted voluntarily.

9. A CTO authorizes another health

professional to forcibly treat (e.g., drug and/or electroshock) you in the community. If you refuse the treatment or miss a doctor's appointment, the police can force you back into a psychoprison ("mental health centre") where you will be locked up, drugged and/or shocked for a longer period.

10. Under the Mental Health Act, any doctor can lock you up for 72 hours for "observation and assessment" on the belief or suspicion you are "mentally ill" and dangerous - without a hearing or trial. This is preventive detention which is prohibited by international law. During this time, you have no legal right to appeal your incarceration, which also violates your rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.



11. The Toronto police have killed several "mentally ill" and homeless citizens during the last twelve years - most were men of colour. For example, in 1988 Lester Donaldson was killed by the Toronto police while defending himself in his own home. In 1997, Edmond Wai Hong Yu - Chinese, homeless and a brilliant former medical student with a brief psychiatric history - was shot and killed on a deserted TTC bus by policeman Lou Pasquino. Pasquino was never charged in this incident. One-and-a-half years ago, Hungarian immigrant Otto Vass, once labelled "schizophrenic" when he tried to refuse "medication", was kicked to death in five minutes by four Toronto police officers outside a 711 store. All were charged with manslaughter, the trial has not yet started.

12. The Tory Implementation Task Force on "mental health" (Toronto-Peel Region) is approximately one-year old, it's chaired by former Federal Tory Finance Minister Michael Wilson. (This is one of 9 such "Task Forces" currently meeting in the Province). The task force is dominated by psychiatrists and other "service providers" - there are only 3 or 4 psychiatric survivors on this 34-member committee. It also holds secret meetings.

Psychiatric survivors have started reaching out to other poor and vulnerable people in social justice organizations such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), Street Health, and the Ontario Common Front. We're determined to throw the Tories out, because they've violated our human rights and seriously threatened our health and lives. We must resist now. **IT'S TIME TO FIGHT TO WIN.**

note: People Against Coercive Treatment (PACT) is a grassroots group of psychiatric survivors and human rights activists in Toronto totally opposed to CTOs and all other forced treatment in Ontario. For more info on PACT and the survivor movement, please see these websites: <www.tao.ca/~pact> <www.MindFreedom.org> Ph: 416-760-2795 E-mail: <pact@tao.ca>

(Don Weitz is an anti-psychiatry activist and a member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. He was co-founder of the magazine **Phoenix Rising** and co-editor (with Dr. Bonnie Burstow) of the book **Shrink Resistant: The Struggle against Psychiatry in Canada**.)

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Contributions welcome!
(Contributions may be edited for space)

