by Leonard Roy Frank

The logic of 1984 is upon us. The slogans of Orwell's futuristic classic - FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, WAR IS PEACE, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH - have their counterparts in Institutional Psychiatry, among whose devotees CONFORMITY IS SANITY, MYSTICISM IS MADNESS, and TORTURE IS THERAPY.

The key to Institutional Psychiatry's power in our society lies in involuntary commitment, the legal method its practitioners use to hospitalize and forcibly treat persons alleged to be "mentally ill," who either do not acknowledge their illness or, if they acknowledge it, will not voluntarily undergo treatment.

Dr. Thomas S. Szasz, author of The Manufacture of Madness, has charged that involuntary mental hospitalization is "a crime against humanity" and that mental illness is "a myth" by means of which certain persons or groups justify their efforts to control individuals who have not violated any laws but whose unconventional ideas and behavior disturb or otherwise inconvenience the community.

Although the typical practice of Institutional Psychiatry should be challenged on humane, social, and legal grounds I have decided to focus in this article on the question of religious liberty and what I regard as its frequent and gross violation by institutional psychiatrists.

Any thought or deed may be religiously founded. Although freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution, it is often denied in psychiatric courts and mental institutions, where certain unconventional thoughts and acts, which may be religiously motivated, are interpreted as symptoms of mental illness. Contrary to Dr. Szasz's view almost all institutional psychiatrists accept mental illness as a fact, although there is considerable disagreement among them as to what constitutes mental illness, and who is and who is not mentally ill.

Such judgements will vary greatly, depending on the personality and belief-system of the diagnosing psychiatrist. For example, "non-religious" psychiatrists (such as Freud, who dismissed religion as "a universal obsession neurosis") might easily read "symptom" into almost anything a religiously-oriented person said or did - especially if the individual did not belong to a well-established religious group or, if be-
time, he in all likelihood would be condemned, not as he was then, but as a paranoid schizophrenic and committed to a psychiatric institution, which would be subjected to the progressive violence of "intensive therapy," including forced medication, electric shock treatment, and psychosurgery.

If you think this is far-fetched, consider what psychiatrist William Hirsch concluded about the mental condition of Jesus: "Everything that we know about him conforms so perfectly to the clinical picture of paranoia that it is hardly believable that people can ever question the accuracy of the diagnosis." (1)

The following three selections concerning the afore-mentioned therapies, when taken together, represent the viewpoint which all most all institutional psychiatrists would find unacceptable, if not downright reprehensible:

DRUG TREATMENT - "Though the claim is made, the drugs are for the 'patient's benefit in treating his illness,' none of the patients interviewed during the study said they felt any better because of the drugs and all reported to the one doctor put it, 'What we offer the patient is control and the drugs are just another form of control - a chemical strait jacket.' The most common reason given by patients for taking the drugs was to keep the doctor happy. The fact is that each 'patient' is made quickly to understand that if he does not take the drugs, he is subject to forced injection. These drugs have devastating side effects and patients reported being extremely uncomfortable." (2)

SHOCK TREATMENT - "What counts alone with most shock therapists is its impact, and the shock machine's control over the patient. Its efficacy is based not merely upon a defeat of the patient, but on a physical complication of the body. Thus, patient is subjected to torture. He is subjected to the patient's own body, which is considered to be his own." (3)

I ask every reader of this article to select representatives at the local, state, and national levels to this monstrous situation and in any other way within the law to privately and publicly demonstrate his concern and compassion for America's most brutalized and silenced minority. (6)

FOOTNOTES:

(1) "I avoid using words like schizophrenia just as I avoid using words like 'wap' and 'nigger'." Karl A. Menninger, "Saturday Evening Post," April 25, 1964, p.12ff.
(5) "Doctors in all ages have made fortunes by killing their patients by means of their cures. The difference in psychiatry is that it is the death of the soul," R.D. Laing. "The Obvious." The Dialectics of Liberation. Edited by David Coopermore. Penguin Books, 1968, p. 18.
(6) "Mental patients in the United States suffer widespread and grievous violation of their constitutional rights. I believe that today more patients than members of particular racial or religious groups, are the principal scapegoats of our society." Thomas S. Szasz. Law, Liberty and Psychiatry. New York: Collier Books, p. 190.

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