



American psychiatry after World War II (1944-1994) By Roy W. Menninger, John Case Nemiah



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adherents with the growth of neurobiological psychiatry and confirmed the validity of psychiatry.²

In 1985 the long-simmering disputes within the antipsychiatry ex-patient movement finally resulted in the dissolution of public unity, and several new “reformist” competing organizations were formed. First there was the National Mental Health Consumers’ Association, from which discontented members resigned to create the National Alliance of Mental Patients. In 1986 the disputes led the monthly journal *Madness Network News: A Journal of the Psychiatric Inmates’ Liberation Movement*, which had appeared for a decade under different names, to cease publication. At issue were the questions of reform versus revolution, total independence versus support from the establishment, and the failure of radical politics significantly to empower the ex-patient activists. Former radicals-turned-reformers, such as Judi Chamberlin, no longer denied the reality of mental disorders or totally rejected cooperation with psychiatrists. Even before then, left-wing intellectuals, psychiatrists, and political activists who advocated antipsychiatry had admitted that their expectations about the destruction of psychiatry and the support its destruction would give to revolutionary movements, a position popular in post-1968 France, had not materialized. Nor had mental patients notably benefited from radical politics (National Organizations 1986), albeit civil rights attorneys had succeeded in winning patients’ rights in state courts. This dissent over goals, means, and power also plagued the few facilities controlled by ex-patients. At the same time, by the 1980s, some leading American psychiatrists were beginning to listen to their critics and were making overtures to the organized ex-patients. Some of these ex-patients, after much soul-searching and argument (and after years of demonstrations outside psychiatrists’ meetings and mental hospitals), accepted the American Psychiatric Association’s invitation to attend its 1985 annual meeting (see also Chapter 13 by Beard, this volume).

Other Attacks on Psychiatry

Both reformist and radical views were buttressed by claims of abuse of mental hospital patients and bad side effects from drugs and other treatments. A notable genre of antipsychiatry literature involved exposés of psychiatrists who conducted unethical “scientific” experiments on mental patients, or worse, those who participated in their persecution and execution in Nazi Europe. Among these activities were the post-World War II secret experiments

² The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill has grown rapidly in size and power. Psychiatrist Melvin Sabshin noted that the “families of severely ill mental patients . . . felt attacked by psychotherapeutic and sociotherapeutic concepts in psychiatry” and find a somatic approach much more acceptable. The Alliance’s “passionate espousal of biological psychiatry” has been, moreover, of great help to psychiatry (Sabshin 1990, p. 1271).

with LSD and electric shock by various psychiatrists, some working for governmental agencies, and the leadership role of prominent German psychiatrists in the sterilization and murder of about 275,000 German mentally ill “useless eaters” during the Nazi era, a subject largely ignored by the American psychiatric profession (Dain 1989). (One could also note that French psychiatrists during the German occupation were involved in exterminating an estimated 40,000 mental patients [Escoffier-Lambiotte 1987]). Ex-patient Lenny Lapon (1986) claimed that thousands of mental patients died each year in the United States consequent to the use of chemicals, electric shock, and lobotomies, among other treatments. He did not, however, say that these deaths were, as in Nazi Germany, intentional—a very important difference—but he suggested a similarity in attitudes toward the mentally disabled. R. D. Laing (1985) observed in his autobiography that psychiatry stressed the difference between the sane and the insane and thereby could come to the same conclusion about exterminating the insane as that drawn by the Nazi regime. (But Laing surely knew that most psychoanalysts and many psychiatrists did not make a sharp distinction between the sane and the insane.) The horrible brutality of German psychiatrists cannot be denied, and it is true that American psychiatry as an organized profession did, except in the case of the Soviet Union, seek to avoid the issue of violations of the physicians’ obligation not to harm patients. In this regard, psychiatrists have been more typical than exceptional: all professions tend to be reticent in criticizing their members’ ethical lapses, the medical profession included.

The assault on psychiatry from the political left had begun in the late 1960s as part of the countercultural, anti-institutional ideology and activism of the time. Earlier, in the 1950s, psychiatry had come under attack from the political right, a reflection in part of the Cold War and its offshoot, McCarthyism. The newly formed political radical right-wing antipsychiatry movement of the 1950s categorically opposed psychiatry as a liberal, left-wing, subversive, communist, anti-American plot; psychoanalysis (with which the ex-patients were not much concerned because it had affected mainly a small, select, nonhospitalized clientele) came under special attack because of its foreign (i.e., Jewish?) origin and supposed sexual and political liberalism. Unaffected by the antipsychiatry among avant-garde intellectuals and unconventional psychiatrists, these right-wing activists incorporated their hatred and fear of psychiatry and of modernism in general into a predominantly anti-Communist, nationalist world view. In 1965 writer Donald Robison reported in *Look* magazine that “a horde of John Birchers and other members of the Radical Right descended upon the Wisconsin legislature last year, shouting that the mental-health movement in Wisconsin was a subversive plot. They caused the defeat of some 20 mental-health measures that seemed certain of passage” (Robison 1965, p. 28). Similarly in California, extremists “raised . . . a furor about Kremlin-directed brainwashing” (Robison 1965, p. 28). Dr. Jack B. Lomas, clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, said he knew “a number of mentally sick men and women who were so fright-

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ened by the anti-mental-health propaganda that they killed themselves rather than accept help from any psychiatrist" (Robison 1965, p. 29). At a 1958 American Legion convention in California, a unanimous resolution was passed declaring that "certain forces dedicated to the overthrow of our form of government have distorted the magnitude of the problem of mental health out of true proportion" (Robison 1965, p. 31). Another rightist declared that "sane individuals" were hospitalized, and another asked, "Will YOU sit idly by and allow them to be TORTURED and MURDERED?" (Robison 1965, p. 31; see also National Association for Mental Health 1962; San Fernando Valley Doctors Committee on Mental Health 1961).

The Church of Scientology, a self-help movement of the 1950s founded by science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard and turned into a religious sect, claimed to have discovered the "only technology of the mind that can get rid of the source of your problems, fears, psychosomatic illness and unwanted emotions" (Hubbard 1950/1992, n.p.). The "Church," from the 1960s to the time of this writing, claimed that its own spiritual healing technology made psychiatry superfluous and actively opposed publicly funded hospital psychiatry. When not totally rejecting psychiatry, scientologists insisted on procedures that made commitment of patients to mental hospitals nearly impossible by suggesting, for example, jury trials for all commitments. In the hospitals, scientologists worked to deny psychiatrists the right, in effect, to treat committed patients by insisting that those patients willing to receive treatment should be informed that all psychiatric practices, including electroconvulsive treatment, chemotherapy, and lobotomy, endangered their health and could cause death. The scientologists went so far as to attribute whatever they considered undesirable or dangerous in American life, including racism, to be a product of the practice of psychiatry. Scientology's antipsychiatry campaign differed from that of other antipsychiatry groups in being better organized and better funded and by its widespread use of lawsuits to stifle criticism of scientology as a spurious religion and false science, and to fight exposés of its allegedly shady financial practices. Also very important was scientology's prestige-building alliances with well-known nonscientologist critics of psychiatry such as Szasz, civil rights lawyer Bruce Ennis, and feminist psychologist Phyllis Chesler; it attracted former mental patients such as Leonard Roy Frank and won endorsements from entertainment notables John Travolta and Chick Corea, among others (Church of Scientology 1973; Citizens Commission on Human Rights 1981, 1995; Frank 1979; Hubbard 1950/1992; Malko 1970; Wallis 1977).

Religionists and Antipsychiatry

Among the rightist antipsychiatry crusaders could be found fundamentalist Christian believers, who added anticommunism to the traditional antimodernism that had distinguished them from modernist Protestants earlier in the

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