

# BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL

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*Correspondents are urged to write briefly so that readers may be offered as wide a selection of letters as possible. So many are now being received that the omission of some is inevitable. Letters should be signed personally by all their authors.*

## World Psychiatric Association and Soviet Psychiatry

SIR,—I welcome the opportunity to reply to some of the matters raised in your leading article "Cruel Treatment" (9 August, p. 337). The World Psychiatric Association has been very much concerned with the ethical problems of psychiatry and with abuses of our subject of any nature. In November 1969 we held a regional symposium in London entitled "The Uses and Abuses of Psychiatry," the proceedings being published in newspaper form and distributed to a very large medical public throughout the world. In 1971 allegations of abuses of psychiatry in the Soviet Union began to be received by the executive committee. They were transmitted to the All-Union Society of Neurology and Psychiatry, one of our 76 national member societies. None of the complaints came from any of our national member societies, nor was any complaint made by one society against another at the Fifth World Congress of Psychiatry held in Mexico City in December 1971. The executive committee, the 26-man committee, and the general assembly were all made fully cognizant of such complaints. I proposed as secretary general, that an ethical committee of the association be set up, but this proposal was unanimously rejected.

The newly elected executive committee continued to keep the problem under review, and consultations took place with the United Nations Commission of Human Rights; with the World Health Organization; with the Council of Europe and its Commission of Human Rights; with the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences and, through it, with Unesco; and recently with the World Medical Association. All our member societies were circularized asking for information regarding ethical codes

and practices in their countries. In October 1973 a working party was set up consisting of three distinguished Scandinavians, Professor Leo Eitinger of Oslo University, Dr. Clarence Blomquist of Stockholm (the only full-time professor of medical ethics in the world), and Dr. Gerdt Wretmark of Linköping. In August 1973 the executive committee sent the following position statement to all member societies: "The American Psychiatric Association firmly opposes the misuse of psychiatric facilities for the detention of persons solely on the basis of their political dissent, no matter where it occurs," as well as a statement made by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychiatrie und Nervenheilkunde. No comments on these statements were received from our member societies. A seminar on human rights was held at the European Commission of Human Rights on 17 and 18 October 1974 and was attended by representatives of 15 member societies—including the All-Union Society of Psychiatrists and Neurologists—as well as by committee and executive committee members. Attempts have been made and are being made to organize a meeting in Africa on human rights, and in Venezuela. Our aim over the past five years has been a serious study of a complex set of problems. A plenary session at the Sixth World Congress will be devoted to the topic and we hope that a series of seminars leading up to this session may be held. Can it be seriously maintained, in view of what has been done, that the W.P.A. has dragged its feet or been ambiguous in its attitude toward the ethical problems of psychiatry?

As to setting up "a body capable of carrying out impartial inquiries," I would

recommend your readers to study the organization and workings of the Commission of Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the only working and effective human rights organization in the world. It has a large budget, a building of its own, a legally qualified secretariat, and a panel of judges drawn from the signatories of the Convention. One case alone, the Irish Government *v.* the U.K., has been in progress for at least three years and is not yet complete. And the commission works only on a regional basis. If justice is to be done, then judicial methods must be used, as at the Commission of Human Rights. The creation of such a commission is quite beyond the financial, professional, and organizational scope of international associations such as the W.P.A. It is either naivety, ignorance, or hypocrisy to suggest otherwise.

Now for Dr. Semyon Gluzman. The All-Union Society deny that he is a psychiatrist—he has never been a member of any psychiatric society in the U.S.S.R. and spent three months in all in a psychoneurological clinic. I had made inquiries about Dr. Gluzman in Moscow in 1973 and later, in 1974, had, I hope, forcibly brought his plight to the attention of colleagues in the U.S.S.R. We in the executive committee of W.P.A. are just as concerned as other doctors with the misfortunes of our medical colleagues throughout the world and associate ourselves with the sentiments expressed in the cable sent recently by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Luckily, our officers are also able to discuss quite freely and directly the situation of some doctors in that country with colleagues in the Soviet Union. Surely this is an approach not to be denigrated but to be welcomed.

A word about some of the problems of international work. Money is scarce and all our officers act in an honorary capacity. Our membership includes almost every country in the world where there are psychiatrists, apart from the People's Republic of China, who have never applied to join but whom