

A MENTAL PATIENTS' UNION.

Mental patients are one of the most subtly oppressed groups in this society. Labelled by psychiatry and the medical profession 'psychopath', 'schizophrenic', 'character disorder' etc. the patient is refused the most basic rights and invalidated as a human being. He is punished for any attempt to be himself as opposed to what society wants him to be, by brain surgery, electric shock, drugs, and confinement in hospital- all under the guise of 'treatment' and 'benevolence'.

The minority of patients are middle class 'deviants' e.g. drop-outs, politicians; but the vast majority are working class, coming from areas of poverty, high unemployment, bad housing etc. Unable to sustain the blows inflicted on them by a competitive, alienated, and dehumanised society, it is hardly surprising that some people are rendered helpless in the face of the limitless problems of their repressed existence. Psychiatry, far from scrutinising the causes of depression and other reactive 'illnesses', looks only at the symptoms, conning the patient into the belief that it is he, not the system, who is at fault. Just as the poor are blamed for their poverty, the unemployed for their idleness and slum tenants for their housing conditions, the mental patient is blamed for his 'illness'. Therefore at the same time as having a vested interest in the perpetuation of the myth of 'mental illness', psychiatry colludes with and supports the class system. Psychiatry is one of the tools that capitalism uses to ensure that frustration and anger against the oppressive system is internalised. It is time the mental patient fought back and joined other oppressed groups in the class struggle.

So far, however, the only 'offensive' against psychiatry and the mental hospital has been the shop-talk of student and professional groups. It seems that these groups have colluded with the concept that mental patients are 'inadequate' and incapable of PATIENT POWER. But at the same time, so has the Left and the Trade Union movement. Because of this money and help has never been channelled into building a mental patients' organisation.

WHAT CAN A UNION DO???

Establish a Charter of Rights. e.g.: the RIGHT to refuse treatment; the RIGHT to be represented by a member of the union wherever the Mental Health Act is enforced e.g. compulsory admissions, and wherever the patient requires e.g. at ward-rounds, tribunals; the RIGHT for a patient to wear his own clothing in hospital; the RIGHT to refuse to work in hospital; the RIGHT to see visitors; the RIGHT to uncensored letters and phone calls; the RIGHT to a free second opinion from a psychiatrist of the patients' choice; the RIGHT to effective appeal.

ALSO:

to ABOLISH compulsory hospitalisation; to ABOLISH all irreversible forms of treatment e.g. electric shock, brain surgery, specific drugs; to ABOLISH compulsory treatment; to ABOLISH solitary confinement; the eventual abolition of the mental hospital and manipulative psychiatry.

The union would also hopefully, expose the myths of 'illness', 'rehabilitation', 'voluntary treatment' and 'community care', and propagandise hospitals, hostels, day centres, industrial units etc. The Union could also work to fight for alternatives such as drop-in/live-in centres without hierarchies and treatment.

Information and donations.. contact; Pilot committee for a mental patients' union, c/o Flat I, 13 Christchurch Road, Crouch End, London N.8.

Pamphlet-'the need for a mental patients' union' available 10p + postage, from above address.