

NATIONAL COMMITTEE *against* MENTAL ILLNESS

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May 14, 1969

Dear Colleagues in the Dark:

On May 13th, I received a revised version of the Introduction to the report of the Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children. For some strange reason, this version was sent only to members of the Executive and Editorial Committees.

Let me make the following points about the new draft, which is dated May 8th:

1. All of the references to the mentally ill child, which were in my draft of March 14th and the Editorial Committee draft of March 22nd, have been completely removed. The new version is a general soap opera discussion of the rights of children and the duties of society.

2. This emasculation was performed at the April 18th meeting of the Executive Committee. In addition to the members of the Executive Committee, those present at the April 18th meeting included three members of the Editorial Committee -- Dr. Irving Berlin, Dr. William Morse and Norman Lourie.* At the March 22nd meeting of the Editorial Committee, only Bill Morse, Norman Lourie and I were present. Dr. Berlin did not attend. Of this group, I was

the only one not invited to the April 18th supposed joint meeting of the Executive and Editorial Committees. I understand the dynamics underlying my exclusion -- I would predictably have raised holy hell with the pabulum and drivel which finally came out of that meeting.

3. It is my understanding that Dr. Berlin made the motion at the April 18th meeting to remove the many references and statistics relating to emotionally ill children in our country. I find this particularly puzzling, since on March 26th he wrote me the following comments on the Introduction which I had prepared:

"My congratulations at putting your pen where our mouths usually are! I thought your re-writing of the Introductory chapter and the major recommendations were a tremendous improvement . . . I like your emphasis on the mentally ill and seriously disturbed child and the excision of the word family."

In his letter to me, Dr. Berlin goes on to say that: "Starting on page six of the Introduction it seems that you hit so clearly the style that must be utilized throughout the recommendations that I would like to see these placed first." I am absolutely baffled by this, because page six is a hard-hitting presentation of the case history of a disturbed child which was taken from actual testimony recently related to a senate committee.

Dr. Berlin continues: "It also seemed that in order to make the Congress future-oriented we needed to spell out, as I indicated in the beginning, the statistics which we now have and their implications for the next few years in terms of increased mental illness, crime and delinquency,

school problems, etc. Such simple facts as those gathered by the juvenile court judges throughout the country that referrals to juvenile courts have tripled in 10 years in metropolitan areas, and have more than quadrupled in suburban areas."

I know that my friend Irv Berlin is not physically well; he has apologized to me for a few inconsistencies in his performance due to his having to take heavy dosages of a certain medication. I understand this, but it in no way changes my attitude toward the new version of the Introduction.

4. The exclusion of all references to the mentally ill child is not a small point. At the annual Board Meeting of the Joint Commission on March 1st, representatives of the American Psychiatric Association, the National Association for Mental Health, the National Society for Autistic Children, and many others protested that earlier versions of the report, which they had seen, inexcusably ignored the sick child. Several of these organizations had representatives at the April 18th meeting of the Executive Committee, but I wonder what in heaven they were doing!

I think I know something about the life style of Members of Congress. I know that you must make your case first with the establishment of demonstrable need and suffering -- this is the material which elicits their interest and moves them on to other aspects of the report. The Congress acts only when it feels the wound; there is no wound in the latest version of the Introduction. Generalities about societal neglect of our children put Congressmen to sleep.

At the press conference on May 5th at the American Psychiatric Association convention, during which the major recommendations of the Joint Commission were presented, Senator Abraham Ribicoff, who is the author of the

1965 legislation creating the Commission, demonstrated this pragmatic Congressional attitude when he devoted a major part of his remarks to statistics on the lack of care for emotionally disturbed children, which he described as "shocking".

5. This is absolutely my last effort to aid in the development of a hard-hitting report. At the March 1st meeting of the full Board of Directors, I was alone in expressing my considered feeling that a small group of "inner experts" was dictating the thrust of the final report. I know, and I think you should know, that much of the policy is being set by only four members of the Executive Committee who have met a number of times "unofficially" to decide on the major recommendations. I said then, and I say now, that the Board of Directors and the affiliate organizations are largely window dressing -- they are being presented with conclusions, either three or four days before a meeting or several weeks after one. I have been a part of seven Presidential and Congressionally appointed Commissions; I have seen none as undemocratic as this one.

6. May I make one final suggestion: Those of you who are interested in doing something meaningful for our children should wire Dr. Joseph Bobbitt at the Commission headquarters protesting this latest draft of the Introduction. Since the Executive Committee meets again on Monday, May 19th -- which is typically not announced in Dr. Lourie's timetable of meetings dated May 8th -- an immediate response is urgent. For those of you who have not seen this latest draft, I would suggest that you call Dr. Bobbitt and ask that he send one to you immediately.

7. If you will excuse a personal note, I am resigning from the non-functioning Editorial Committee. At the March 1st meeting of the Board of Directors, Dr. Barton made a motion which passed unanimously giving the Editorial Committee the responsibility for drawing up the major recommendations of the report. We have had only one meeting of the Editorial Committee -- which took me three weeks to pull together -- and we have been excluded from any further significant rewriting.

I will continue to speak out on the needs of our mentally ill children, and I will continue to stress the plight of our four million emotionally disturbed children. I shall feel free wherever I go, and in Congressional testimony, to make what comments I choose on the inadequacies of the Joint Commission report.

Let me close on a somewhat ironic note. Several weeks ago, I received a letter from Dr. Eveleen Rexford commending my efforts in revising the earlier version of the report. She suggested that I get a number of extra credits in my passage to heaven. Conversely, I offer a number of demerits to accelerate the passage to another place of those who are still trying to emasculate the thrust of this report.

I enclose the letter from Dr. Rexford.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Gorman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mike Gorman

Enclosure

*Correction - Mr. Norman Lourie did not attend the April 18th meeting.