

## HENRY WAXMAN

## A mockery of glasnost?

The World Psychiatric Association (WPA) voted Wednesday in Athens to allow conditional membership for the All Union Society of Soviet Psychiatrists — with full membership down the road if certain conditions are met. In 1983, the Soviets were condemned by the WPA for their abusive practices. The Soviets resigned rather than face certain expulsion.

A WPA delegation is to visit the Soviet Union within a year to determine if psychiatric abuses still exist. If the delegation decides that abuse has not ended, a special general assembly will convene to reconsider Soviet membership.

Soviet citizens are finally beginning to benefit from glasnost. After decades of Soviet repression, human rights are being granted, political activism is on the upswing and there is a new openness in many areas of society.

It is this openness that is really at the heart of glasnost. It is not only

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allowing breakthroughs to occur everywhere from agricultural enterprise to free elections, but also a willingness to admit past repression and abuses of power.

Why Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has not allowed glasnost similarly to find its way to Soviet psychiatry remains a mystery to many in the West. For years the Soviet response to religious and political dissent has been the imprisonment and torture of hundreds of healthy activists. Political dissidents continue to languish in psychiatric prisons for non-medical reasons.

Thousands of former victims of Soviet psychiatric abuses, who were not only wrongfully imprisoned in the first place, (for whom treatment for "delusions of reformism" consisted of forced incarceration and harmful drug injections), still face discrimination in all spheres of Soviet society because their names remain on a psychiatric register.

Continued Soviet unwillingness to dismantle the system that allows psychiatric abuses to occur makes a mockery of glasnost. Mr. Gorbachev's glasnost is supposed to allow Soviet citizens to engage in criticism and to feel a sense of openness. For many who dare to do so, glasnost holds brutal punishment by the Soviet Union's own institutions.

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It has taken years for the cries of Western human rights advocates and psychiatrists to be heard and responded to by the Soviets. To their credit, the Soviets have started owning up to this reprehensible system of psychiatric abuses.

Since Mr. Gorbachev's rule, cer-

tain abuses have been acknowledged in the Soviet press. The year 1987, in which numerous political prisoners and labor-camp internees were granted freedom, was also marked by the release of a number of political prisoners from psychiatric wards. In a surprise statement read before the WPA, the All Union Society of Soviet Psychiatrists acknowledged past abuses of Soviet psychiatry. The society also claimed that the names of more than 1 million former victims of psychiatry abuses were removed from their infamous psychiatric register.

However, the system that allowed these atrocities to occur is still in place. Eleven of the 15 members of the presidium of the All Union Society who called the WPA condemnation of their abuses a "slandorous campaign" in 1983 are still on that presidium. The psychiatrist who prescribed harmful drugs to human rights activist Victor Davidoff in 1981 is now the chief medical officer of the Serbsky Institute of Psychiatry. Drs. Landau and Taltze, two

other leading psychiatrists at the Serbsky Institute who improperly diagnosed Mr. Davidoff, remain unrepentant and in their prominent positions.

Mr. Davidoff testified recently at a House Health and Environment Subcommittee hearing which I chaired. He, too, was incredulous that the same doctors — the same jailers — who eight years ago were injecting him with thiorazine and other tranquilizing drugs, remain as leaders in Soviet psychiatry. On a visit to Russia only two weeks ago, Mr. Davidoff attempted to meet with his former psychiatrists in an effort to discuss psychiatric reforms. Not only was he denied a meeting, he was also told that unless he left the grounds the police would be called.

In a move that was well-received, the Soviet Embassy sent a representative to testify on Soviet psychiatric practices at the recent hearing. Georgi Markosov, the first secretary, spoke of sweeping reforms taking place in Soviet psychiatry, claiming that "psychiatrists who wrongly hospitalize mentally healthy persons may be sentenced to a two-year prison term." Where is the justice for Mr. Davidoff's former "psychiatrists"? Far from serving time in Soviet prisons, they are sit-

ting on their thrones of power, ready to reactivate the former mechanisms for "treating" Soviet dissidents. It appears that the purported mechanisms to enforce the Soviet claims of change are not yet in place.

The tentative nature of the WPA's vote to allow conditional membership should serve as a signal to Soviet psychiatrists that full membership will only be considered when they prove their commitment to glasnost by dismantling the system that allows abuses to occur.

In a recent letter of appeal to his Western colleagues, Kiev psychiatrist Semyon Gluzman wrote:

"I don't understand ... how one can accept back into the WPA people who tortured in the past and do not acknowledge it today. The people the WPA would get back would not be the thousands of ordinary Soviet psychiatrists who saw it all and understood it all, but were afraid to protest, but rather the false scientists and hangmen, the stained ones, those without a conscience, the incompetent ones."

We in the West should acknowledge and encourage changes in Soviet psychiatric practices. It is also incumbent upon us to heed the words of Dr. Gluzman as we continue to monitor Soviet psychiatric wards.