

zisms available to international human rights norms. If the World Bank moves to take human rights factors, as well as environmental ones, into account when assessing projects for loans this will indeed add much needed arsenal to the fight against human rights abuses. Those wishing to become involved in the work of Amnesty International can contact the organisation by writing to Amnesty International, PO Box A159, Sydney South, NSW, 2000.

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chelmsford royal commission

We could not help it: we were never told.
No doubt there were some rumours of a crime,
We'd lost our glasses, so we could not see.
We walked away: it was not our concern
The streets were dark and it was very cold.
It did not seem important at the time.

John Mander, *As it Was*

no informed consent. The Chelmsford Royal Commission, headed by Commissioner Justice Slattery, has commenced in New South Wales. It will investigate the mental health service and the use of deep-sleep therapy at the former Chelmsford Private Hospital, said to be responsible for the deaths of up to 40 patients. The treatment, administered between 1963 and 1979, involved putting patients into a barbiturate-induced coma without their consent for up to 4 weeks. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, in a series of articles, uncovered a story of medical malpractice, cover-ups and bureaucratic buck-passing. The articles alleged:

- A psychiatrist, Dr John Sydney Smith, took up the cases of victims of deep sleep treatment at Chelmsford Hospital. From more than ten separate approaches to key positions in medicine, law and politics at home and overseas, Dr Smith supported by the barrister Mr Ted St John, QC, failed to achieve any substantive inquiry into Chelmsford.

- One of the world's leading psychiatrists urged Dr Smith not to expose deep sleep therapy. The former Professor of Psychiatry at Cambridge University, Sir Martin Roth, wrote on 6 January 1981, saying 'the inhumanity and cruelty to which patients appear to have been subjected is quite unique in my experience and the scientologists and other organisations will have obtained ammunition for years or decades to come. There is therefore a pressing need for maintaining strict confidentiality at this stage, until one can set these barbarities in the context of contemporary practice in psychiatry'.

- The spokesman for the NSW branch of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Professor Brent Waters said that in the early 1980s the college had deliberately left it to the Government to take action against the doctors involved in deep sleep therapy. After taking legal advice, the college believed it could have been 'sued to its skin' had it disbarred Dr Harry Bailey, the doctor who introduced deep sleep therapy to the hospital. 'I guess we were hoping the Department of Health working through the NSW Medical Board would take him to task for malpractice' he said. 'We have got absolutely no power. Its the Medical Board that's got all the power. I think the Department of Health should have used its power'.

- Complaints to the investigating committee of the NSW Medical Board were not lodged against the Chelmsford doctors by the Department of Health until 1985, four years after they were received. In September 1986, the complaints were stayed by the Court of Appeal because of the time that had elapsed since the alleged offences occurred.

standing denied. The Commission stirred controversy on the first day of the hearings when members of the Chelmsford Victims' Action Group were denied standing to ap-

pear. Others refused leave to appear included the Citizens' Committee on Human Rights and former Chelmsford doctors named in the *Herald* articles. Justice Slattery commented that if everyone was given leave to appear, the inquiry would last centuries. The *Sydney Morning Herald* criticised this ruling, saying

Justice Slattery has said that interested parties can reapply for leave to appear if something comes up which affects them. Why does that not satisfy the former patients? The reason is not hard to guess. Such an arrangement simply fails to take account of the anxiety the patients naturally feel after so many years of official delay and indifference. It is a reasonable anxiety to which Justice Slattery should have given more weight. Justice Slattery has also shown a surprising insensitivity by questioning the sincerity of those former Chelmsford patients who feel uneasy about giving evidence before him unless their group is allowed legal representation. His description of this as 'almost blackmail' carries an unpleasant echo of the Court of Appeal's blocking in 1986 of complaints against two former Chelmsford doctors on the grounds that to allow them to be pursued after 13 years would amount to 'persecution'. That decision aroused widespread criticism because of the scant regard it appeared to pay to the real capacity of former psychiatric patients to move against their doctors in what a court might regard as good time. Justice Slattery's talk of 'blackmail' must arouse similar criticism. His inquiry will be fair. But it must also be more sensitive than it has been so far.

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violence in the media

Adams' first law of television: the weight of the backside is greater than the force of the intellect.

Phillip Adams, 1976.

At the Special Premiers' Conference on gun control on 22 December 1987, concern was expressed about 'the continuous, graphic

display of violence through the visual media'. This concern and others are the focus of a major inquiry by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal into the portrayal, depiction and reporting of violence on television. Announcing the inquiry on 22 August 1988, the then Minister for Transport and Communications, Senator Gareth Evans, said

My initiation of this inquiry reflects the growing concern in the Australian community about the possible effects of the portrayal of violence on television . . . This concern has been reflected in complaints from the public received by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, as well as in submissions to its general licensing inquiries.

He also noted that, while the Tribunal's inquiry would encompass only commercial television, the two government broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, had been invited to make submissions so as to enable the Tribunal to conduct a comprehensive inquiry on television violence. Senator Evans also noted that the Attorney-General, Mr Lionel Bowen MP, had 'already acted regarding current classification guidelines where overt violence is portrayed in videos and films'.

The inquiry's terms of reference require it to investigate

- the depiction of violence in all types of television programs
- ways of ensuring that television stations give proper consideration to the suitability and manner of portraying violence in programs
- the adequacy of powers under the Broadcasting Act 1942 to prevent unacceptable levels of violence on television.

There are five members of the inquiry: Ms Deirdre O'Connor, chairwoman of the ABT, Mr George Negus, television journalist, Mr Michael Ramsden, former Channel Ten director of broadcast practices and standards, Dr Patricia Edgar, director of the Australian Children's Film and Television Foundation and Professor Peter Sheehan, a psychologist.