

VIEWS FROM MONOLITHS BEHIND WINDOWS TO NOTHING

By Dr. Burton Blatt

The Policy and Action Conference is a union of consumers, parents, professionals, attendants, students, their professors, great and ordinary people—each concerned with Monoliths, with departments of mental health, with the inner city, with public schools, with the legislature, and on behalf of all who have asked or wondered what our people have become. We are a union of the once-powerless who remember the joys of unhurried and comforting walks on a summer day; we seek the right to such feelings for all people, for those who may have enjoyed them and for those who have always been denied simple and essential freedoms. We

townships and boroughs and counties — ultimately into states and commonwealths, each representing varying cultures, varying needs, varying loyalties.

Not until a strong union of the 13 states was effected, were they able to become a viable nation; able to achieve full independence from a dominating force.

So it is with us, from varying locales — with varying needs and aspirations. Each struggling to survive — to achieve needed services — merged only to the commonweal status. Still dominated by a force larger than any of the individual bodies.

Only through our own "declaration" — through the creation of a strong "union" can we achieve the needed strength to do battle with politicians and bureaucrats that keep us from attaining the needed services for all the handicapped.

Over 100 years ago Thoreau wrote "We have achieved improved means toward unimproved ends."

It is still painfully true today. Each group, within and among its own, have achieved a measure of success. Some large, some small. However, the ends, fully achieving the needed services for all handicapped, is a distant goal towards which we still must strive.

Again, not individually; not in small bands; not even as isolated large organizations, can we reach the goal. Only through combined efforts, in numbers so large as to represent the "true majority" can we effect aims each of us desires.

Let us join forces NOW — to reach the REACHABLE star — the POSSIBLE DREAM!!

Morton Posner

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have joined together on behalf of the inmates, the State school and hospital residents, the ghetto children, and—to a degree—on behalf of each of us living through these difficult times.

We seek a society where leaders will not merely lead but will be led by greater visions and authorities than they possess—and a society where the people will be led because they are independent, because each person is truly free. We envision a society that will be free of dehumanizing and debilitating State-sponsored domiciles, a society that will evacuate human beings from any facility that abuses or enslaves. We want to create a society that has compassion for all those who are saddened, yet comprehends the differences between he who regrets his own lost years and he who worries for his brothers. We think about a man who weeps, not for those for whom the world may suspect he weeps, but for his zealously and for himself. And, possibly today, each of us is that man.

We have created a conference that earlier reformers, were they here today, would join. We have tried to unite, not about specific task orientations but about powerful ideologies, not about special means but about a consensus of humanistic ends, not about silly slogans thoughtlessly chanted but about infinite perspectives of a complex dilemma. We have tried to describe and understand the subtle as well as the flagrant, ennui as well as flailing arms and diffuse excrement, and pandemonium as an extension of the best-managed "model" institution. We must attempt to convince others—and ourselves—that the State does not own a Man, that the State controls

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but may not buy or sell a human being, or feelings or mind or spirit. The State may, with provocation, kill me, institutionalize me, seclude me, shock me, drug me, dirty me, animalize me. But I, who am the owner, may not kill myself, dirty myself, or dehumanize myself. The State—as it substitutes pills for straight jackets and therapeutic isolation for solitary cells—does not change in the truly important dimensions, as it demands that each of us bend and twist as we scrape low to say grace and pay homage to the State.

Collectively, and each in one's own way with the methods and resources available, we engage the Monoliths that Special Education and Mental Hygiene have become in our time, those solid blocks of ideological, uniform, no-option stone. Yes, we are not misled about those we must do battle with. The Monolith is not the special class, not the segregated curriculum, not even the Willowbrook State School. The Monolith obtains from the paucity, sometimes the complete absence of, alternatives to total segregation. The Monolith—the traditional special education and the traditional mental hygiene system—is the total environment planned and implemented by the city, the State, the institutional, the school. The problem often is not with the good intention but with a limited vision of human potential and what the world may yet become.

Don't some informed men share these concerns? Surely, there have been many—but not nearly enough—who tried to reshape our styles of living and thinking. There have been some among us who understood the difference between feeding and eating and between eating and dining. But all their concerns seem to have led to so meager accomplishment, to so trivial common good! And so our concern, and a small hope, and this conference. For, in spite of some claims that it is darkest before the dawn, one may yet encounter terror at high noon and one may thus conclude that Man's days can be as black as his nights.
