

Halton Hills Outlook

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Their Outlook

Politicians play doctor

There may be stranger ways to make law than the recent changes made here to the Mental Health Act.

But it is hard to imagine how. And the strangeness applies not only to the contents of the law but the process by which it received final approval.

Last December, the Liberal government and the Conservative opposition accepted an amendment to the Mental Health Act by New Democrat Evelyn Gigantes.

It removed the authority of the province's 12 psychiatric review boards to authorize involuntary treatment of mentally disturbed patients.



Queen's Park

By Derek Nelson

The ability to refuse treatment applied to the individuals themselves. If they were judged competent, or to patients' representatives if the patients were judged incompetent to make the decision.

Although passed in December, it wasn't to become law for several months.

According to Health Minister Murray Elston, he almost immediately indicated to both the Conservatives and the NDP that he thought they'd acted hastily.

He introduced a new bill that would have restored the right to treat patients involuntarily.

Except, interestingly, by means of electroshock therapy (ECT) and psychosurgery.

Since the age of drugs overtook psychiatry, psychosurgery has practically disappeared as a means of treatment anyway.

But ECT is still widely used, and effectively.

PLAY DOCTOR

In short, the government had decided to play doctor by eliminating one common means of treatment while allowing others.

It was making a medical decision for a political reason, simply that ECT is controversial.

But it was the principle of involuntary treatment that created the most furor.

On one side, the families of the mentally unbalanced and many of those working in the mental health field supported involuntary treatment.

But several "patient rights" and civil libertarian groups lined up on the other side.

The New Democratic Party, which comes down on the collectivist side on most issues, stood with the individual and his right to say "no" on this one.

The Conservatives supported the Grit legislation partly because of the lobbying of family and professional groups but also because Elston had asked them to. They didn't see it as a partisan issue.

And that was the way matters stayed right through public hearings where the Tories asked for accurate figures on the number of cases in which review board have granted competence overrides in the past.

They didn't get them, bringing critic Phil Andrewes to later claim he was deceived and to ask Elston why the minister hadn't deemed it appropriate to provide him with "the very essence of the argument?"

(The figures, which were eventually released, were 16 applications and 11 orders for competent patients, and 59 applications and 49 orders for "incompetents.")

FLIP-FLOP

What eventually happened was a flip-flop by the Liberals.

They decided to split the issue. The right of competent people to reject treatment would be considered final.

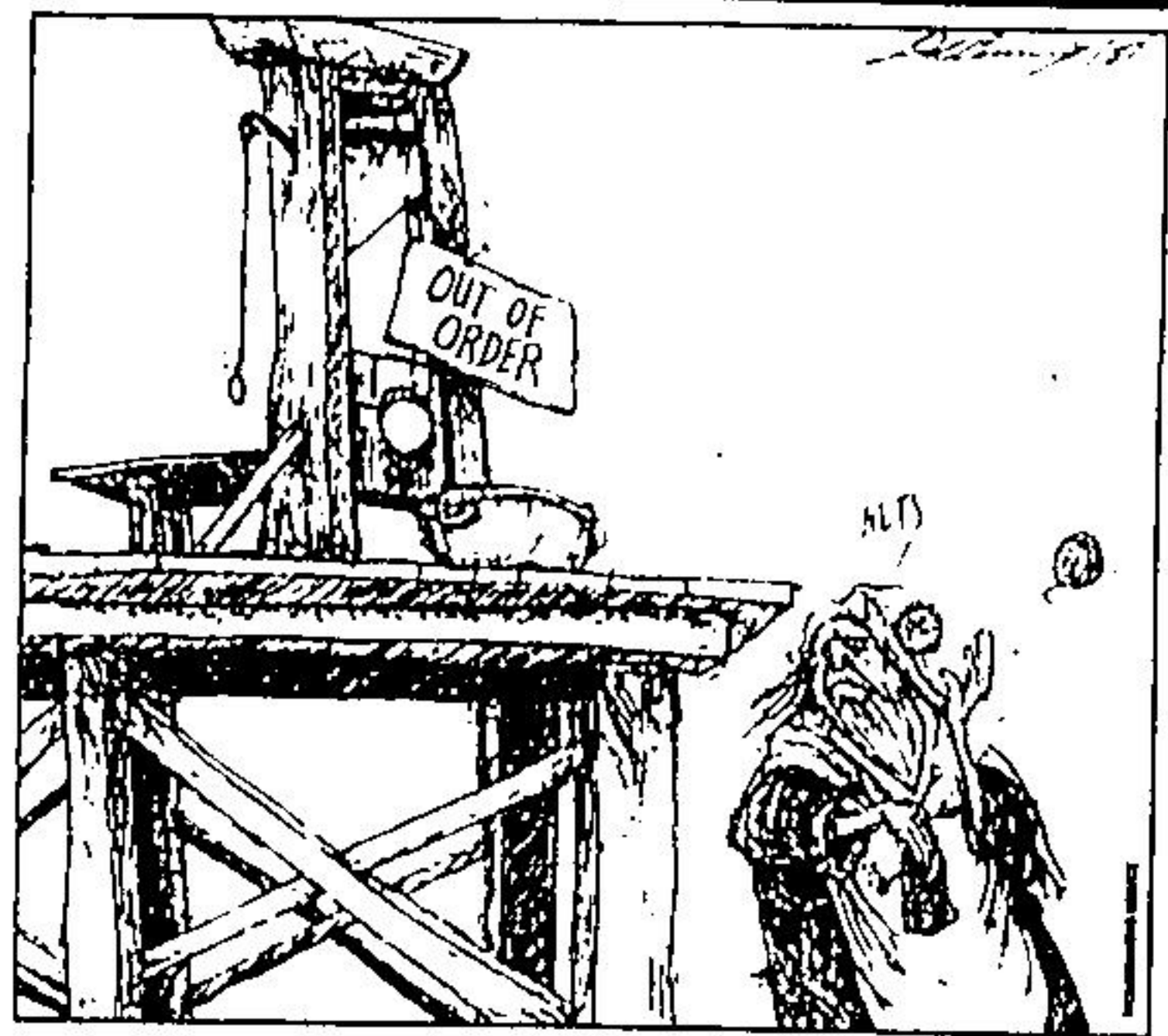
As New Democrat Richard Johnston said, they'd only been included in the first place because of the difficulty of defining competence.

However, those who had been deemed incompetent and were represented by someone else could continue to be forced into treatment.

This was because of a fear that patient rights' advocates might come to represent patients and reject treatment on ideological grounds regardless of the need.

This brought Johnston to suggest that what should be dealt with then is the quality of representation, rather than competence.

It is all quite strange - and ensures that we haven't heard the last of the issues involved.



The 'maturing process'

To be honest, I've always felt that the power of positive thinking is just a little overrated.

Oh, it's certainly comforting to believe that you can get ahead in life just by telling yourself, "every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better."

The problem is that this so often flies in the face of the obvious fact that every day, in various ways, we're getting lousier and lousier. This is called the maturing process.

But now, psychologists are proclaiming that an optimistic outlook can actually improve your health and your ability to overcome stress. There was a news story on this just the other day.

Well, I dunno. It's certainly nice to have a sunny outlook on the world, but I'd like to seek some statistics to back up this claim that optimism can help you live longer.



Weir's View

By Ian Weir

My own theory - admittedly unscientific - is that optimists get hit by buses as often as pessimists do. It's just that the optimists are so much more surprised when it happens.

Still, the psychologists are insisting that optimism is good for you. Indeed, one Michael Scheler, a psychology professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, was quoted as saying: "If I were lost at sea in a lifeboat, I'd much rather be stuck with an optimist than a pessimist."

The professor continued: "I would expect an optimist to be able to row, and for a long period of time, because that person believes it will pay off. A pessimist would lay back in the sun, taking it easy, and say, 'What's the use?'"

Hmm. One could, perhaps, quibble with the basic premise, here.

If two men are stranded in a lifeboat, should we really call the one who is doing all the rowing the optimist? A cynic might call him the sucker.

Still, the professor raises an interesting point - what happens when an optimist and a pessimist get together? (Apart from the inevitable unpleasantness

concerning doughnuts and holes, of course.)

We have all met optimists. These are the people who assure you, after the transmission has fallen out of your new car as you were racing home following notification that your house was burning down: "Some day you'll look back on this and laugh!"

This is why optimists do not have any friends.

And just imagine - to use Prof. Scheler's scenario - being stranded in a lifeboat in the middle of an ocean with this sort of person.

You - as a reasonable, intelligent adult - survey the scene and conclude pessimistically: "We are in the middle of an ocean in an eight-foot lifeboat, out of food and surrounded by sharks. This is not a good situation."

And your companion chirps back: "But at least it's not raining."

You point out to him - calmly and quietly - that the absence of rain is a substantial problem, considering that your containers of fresh water are already half-empty.

He points out, of course, that they are half-full.

Not wishing to debate the point any further, you lie back in the sun while your companion commences rowing energetically. You imagine all the strained muscles he will wake up with tomorrow morning, and for a time this makes you feel better.

Unfortunately, he won't shut up. "If you'd help row," he suggests hopefully, "we'd get there a lot faster."

"This is the middle of an ocean," you point out. "There is nowhere to get to."

He rolls his eyes and shakes his head. "Don't be such a Gloomy Gus. And stop frowning - you'll get wrinkles."

This is the point at which you see a ship, far in the distance. You jump up and down, shouting and waving your arms. The ship takes no notice, and sails over the horizon.

For just a moment, your companion looks crestfallen. And then he brightens, and pats you on the arm. "Some day," he exclaims, "we'll look back on this and laugh!"

Naturally, you have one option. You take up one of the oars - a good stout oar - and apply it liberally.

Once you have finished, you stand panting over your companion and snarl: "And don't let me hear you say, 'at least we've still got our health!'"

Don't listen to the psychologists. Optimism can kill you.



M.P.P. Report

by Don Knight

Ontario workers will enjoy greater protection as the result of proposed changes to the Employment Standards Act. Labour Minister William Wrye recently introduced legislation that will extend the right to severance pay for workers affected by layoffs and terminations.

"Workers in this province have a right to basic economic protection against layoffs and closures," Mr. Wrye told the legislature. "More important, they have a right to retain their dignity in the face of adversity; a right to know that their worth as human beings is not diminished because they are without a job."

Under the legislation, any individual worker with five years employment at an enterprise with an annual payroll of at least \$2.5 million will be eligible for severance pay in cases of termination or lengthy layoff.

Also, the notice-of-termination period that employers would be required to provide to individual or groups of workers will be lengthened.

The worker, community and government must also be informed on why a mass layoff is taking place; what the impact will be, and what the employer is prepared to do to help the affected workers.

Mr. Wrye said the changes "will bring a new measure of economic justice to working men and women in this province."

Workers laid off or terminated as of June 15, 1987 are covered under the legislation.

CLEANING-UP ONTARIO

Environment Minister Jim Bradley recently announced new and expanded funding programs to assist municipalities and industries to improve their waste management systems, beginning this year with \$8.5 million.

The new Comprehensive Funding Program includes provincial aid to help establish landfill sites, transfer stations and processing sites.

Emphasis is also placed on the 4R Programs for Waste Management: reduction, re-use, recovery and recycling. The government hopes that these programs will divert large amounts of waste from less desirable options such as landfill.

Mr. Bradley said the enhanced programs "put substantial resources in the hands of the front-line players who are grappling with" waste disposal problems.

Poets' Corner

A JOLT

Touching you
 is like
 sticking
 my finger
 in a lamp socket
 it lights me up
 and gives me
 a charge.

—By MARLOWE C. DICKSON,
 RR2 Heaton

UP TO SPEED

Another day
 begins
 with unsteady step
 at first
 A thought of you
 brings it to a halt
 a glimpse
 I'm at full gallop.

Marlowe C. Dickson
 R.R. #2 Heaton, Ontario
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SNAFU® by Bruce Beattie



"He only speaks French, but he's trained to show subtitles...."