

# Boy's Shock Treatment

N.Z. Herald 15/12/76

## Raises Protest

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The Auckland Committee on Racism and Discrimination has protested to the Minister of Social Welfare, Mr Walker, over the case of a 13-year-old Niuean boy who was sent to Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital, near Palmerston North, and subjected to courses of electric shock treatment without his parents' knowledge.

The boy, who is an epileptic, had been placed under the guardianship of the Department of Social Welfare after three court appearances for shoplifting, according to official documents and other information supplied to the committee by the boy's parents.

He was also given forced injections of tranquillisers.

A spokesman said yesterday that the committee believed the boy's case raised two important questions.

"We want to know whether the state, when it has taken legal guardianship of a child, has the right to do what it pleases to the body and mind of that child without reference to the child's own natural parents," he said.

### Without Consent

"The second question is whether the state has the right to administer electroconvulsive therapy to a child without the consent of the child or his parents."

The spokesman said they did not want to make the boy's name public because this might adversely affect his future.

In the letter to Mr Walker, the committee said the sending of a 13-year-old behaviourally disturbed child to a hospital for the criminally insane showed that the Auckland division of the Department of Social Welfare was not competent to be entrusted with the care and protection of children.

"We demand you immediately suspend all future

guardianship orders in Auckland until there has been a full inquiry into this case and in the whole operation of the Auckland office," the letter added.

### No English

The boy arrived in Auckland from Niue at the age of six, according to the information supplied to the committee. He spoke no English, and on being enrolled at the Richmond Rd school in 1968 he was put in a special class with mentally disturbed children. His IQ was tested, with the test in English, and his intelligence was assessed as low average or dull.

During the next six years he was sent to a succession of special classes for retarded children at various primary schools, including St John's School at Mangere for mentally handicapped children.

All of the schools found him at times hard to control, and variously described him as over-active, ebullient, aggressive and bullying. During this six-year period of contact with mentally handicapped children he was further assessed as being of borderline deficiency, although he was also described as a "warm, cheerful and affectionate boy."

By July last year the boy had been made a ward of the state after appearances in court for shoplifting. He was placed in the Owairaka Boys' Home and then, in November, sent to the adolescent unit at Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital.

According to an official report by the psychiatrist who treated him at Lake Alice, he was, at the time he was admitted, "a living memorial to the inadequacies of the immigration system in New Zealand."

The report also stated that he "behaved like an uncontrollable animal" and within a few days "was given a brief course of electroconvulsive therapy because of his apparently psychotic behaviour."

The spokesman said the committee had confirmed from the boy's parents that their consent was never sought for the shock treatment. They only learned about it from a letter their son wrote them from the hospital.

"Even now they have no real concept of what electroconvulsive therapy is," the spokesman said.

### Good Progress

When the boy was discharged from Lake Alice in August this year a medical report described his condition as "only moderately improved." However, his teacher at the hospital, whom he liked and came to trust, found that he "worked well and made very good progress . . . once it was clear to him that the teacher was there to help him."

According to the documents supplied to the committee the boy was given final shock treatment a few days before he went home. His mother told committee members that within three days of his return home she became frightened at how strange and ill he became, "with his head back and eyes rolling."

In an interview in Auckland yesterday the boy said he had been given electric shock treatment many times. His impression was that the shocks were given as a punishment.

He said he had usually been given the treatment while strapped to a bed. Electrodes had been placed on his forehead and when the

electricity was turned on it had been extremely painful. He had been aware of going into spasms and of bright lights flashing in front of his eyes.

The boy said he had sometimes struggled with the hospital authorities when they had wanted to give him tranquillising injections, but not when he was told he was to have electroconvulsive therapy.

"I was afraid that if I struggled then they would make the shocks worse for me," he said.

Efforts by the Herald yesterday to trace the medical authorities responsible for the boy's treatment at Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital proved unsuccessful.

Contacted by telephone at his home at Marton, the medical superintendent of Lake Alice, Dr S. L. Pugmire, disclaimed all responsibility. He said the adolescent unit was not part of Lake Alice Hospital and did not come under his jurisdiction. Dr Pugmire referred the inquiry to the board's superintendent-in-chief, Dr Kenneth Archer.

But Dr Archer told the Herald the adolescent unit at Lake Alice had "nothing to do with this board."

He said it was true that although a psychiatrist was employed by the Palmerston North board, he also did some extra sessions at Lake Alice.

### 'No Jurisdiction'

"In anything he does here (at Palmerston North) the psychiatrist is responsible to me," Dr Archer said. "In anything he does at Lake Alice he is responsible to Dr Pugmire. I have no jurisdiction at Lake Alice at all."

Told that Dr Pugmire had just said that the Lake Alice adolescent unit was the Palmerston North Hospital Board's responsibility, Dr Archer replied: "I cannot accept that statement at all."

Experts in Auckland yesterday disagreed on whether it was reasonable to give a 13-year-old boy electroconvulsive therapy.

Mr M. D. Malloy, a lawyer and president of the New Zealand Psychological Society, said the tendency in the 1960s was for electric shock therapy to be supplanted by new forms of drug treatment. He was very surprised to hear that electroconvulsive therapy was still being used on children.

"It seems madness to do this to a boy who is known to have epileptic seizures," he said.

But the professor of psychiatry at the Auckland University medical school, Professor J. S. Werry, said electroconvulsive therapy was one of the safest treatments in medicine and there could be occasions

when it would be justifiable to administer it to a child of 13. It was normally given under anaesthetic, so the patient would not feel anything.

Told that the boy claimed he was given the treatment without anaesthetic, Professor Werry said: "If you do not have a properly trained anaesthetist it is better to give it without anaesthetic."

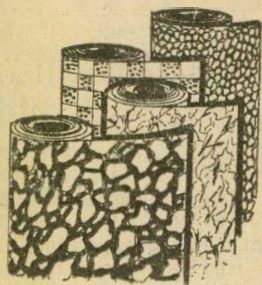
Mr J. K. B. Fountain, director of social work for the Department of Social Welfare, said the department's attitude was that if a boy who was under departmental care was sent to a hospital for treatment, the type of treatment used was the responsibility of the medical authorities. In this case the boy concerned had been "extremely disturbed."

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on another bus service," said  
the ARA chairman, Mr L. I.  
Murdoch.

"The purchase will be de-  
pendent on government  
assistance. We could not  
contemplate it without that."

## Parking Rejected

A recommendation  
that marina licence-  
holders at Westhaven  
have preferential park-  
ing was rejected at  
an Auckland Harbour  
Board meeting yester-  
day.

And debate on the issue  
saw a clash between the  
board chairman, Mr R. W.  
Carr, and a member, Mr H.  
L. Julian.

A report from the boat  
harbours committee on in-  
adequate parking at West-  
haven recommended that  
marina licence-holders have  
preferential parking on a  
"sticker system" on pay-  
ment of an annual fee for  
marina licence renewal.

Mr Carr said he was con-  
cerned at the moving of a  
resolution or amendment by  
Mr Julian which could be  
seen by the public as giving  
him an advantage or bene-  
fit in that he was a tenant  
of the board.

Mr Julian said he took  
umbrage at the remarks and  
said he was in favour of  
supporting the complaints of  
parking in the area.

Mr E. L. Morton said he  
originally did not think it  
right that people who had  
marina licences should have  
preferential parking, but  
having seen the problem on  
Sunday he had now changed  
his mind.

Marina licensees, he said,  
were at least contributing to  
the board's finances and  
used moorings more than the