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It was a typical kind of pre-protest meeting. Although the public may not be aware of it, the fact is that before each protest or demonstration, there are hours — sometimes hundreds of hours — spent in strategy sessions. People — usually quite ordinary people — fret and worry and ponder and plan and argue about what to do when and when not to do what.

It was Thursday night. The demonstration was scheduled for Friday morning. The 30 to 40 people present were all in a fine state of hype-riding on adrenalin. It was, after all, a historic moment of some kind.

For the first time in North America, a group of mental patients would be taking to the streets to protest against the tyranny of mental institutions. As somebody quipped: "When the mental patients start organizing, you know *some things* happening.

The group involved was the Mental Patients Rights Committee, which had evolved out of the Mental Patients Association. The two groups were to be carefully distinguished one from the other. It was *not* an MPA demonstration being organized. It was an MPRC demonstra-

tion. (The Royal Canadian Mental Patients, quipped somebody else.)

There were people sitting on the floor, excitedly discussing their latest input. There were people lounging in chairs and on sofas, calmly reporting their own state of preparedness. The transportation committee, eager to talk about the number of vehicles available.

The only difference between this and a hundred other pre-protest meetings which have taken place in Vancouver in the last couple of years was the fact that the people involved were former mental patients. All things being relative, it was perhaps harder for them to get it together than anyone else.

Perhaps. Hard to tell from appearances. In fact, here was a roomful of "mental patients," supposedly the most helpless of individuals, and there was nothing directionless about their behavior at all. With deadly accuracy, they were taking a bead on Riverview Hospital — where so many of them had suffered imprisonment and physical agony (all in the name of "improving" their mental health) — and now the moment had come to strike back.

The picket signs said it all:
INVOLUNTARY HOSPITALIZATION

**IS PUNISHMENT, NOT TREATMENT:
MENTAL HOSPITALS MANUFACTURE MADNESS:
LIBERTY NOT PSYCHIATRY:
MENTAL ILLNESS IS A MYTH.
SCHIZOPHRENICS ARE CREATED BY A SICK SOCIETY:
DOWN WITH SANE CHAUVINISM:
SOCIETY NEEDS CHANGE NOT ADJUSTMENT.
PSYCHIATRIC COMMITMENT IS IMPRISONMENT WITHOUT TRIAL:
ELECTRO-SHOCK TREATMENT IS PSYCHIATRIC VIOLENCE.**

A big sign on the door of the house said: **FIGHT PSYCHIATRIC VIOLENCE. ATTEND THE DEMONSTRATION.**

In defence of themselves, the "Mental patients" — without doubt the most oppressed and discriminated-against group in modern society — were preparing a counter conference on antipsychiatry and psychiatric violence. One of their pamphlets quoted Dr. David Cooper, who said:

"If one is to speak of violence in psychiatry, the violence that stares out screaming, proclaiming itself as such so loudly that it is rarely heard, is the subtle, tortuous violence that other people, the 'sane ones,' perpetrate against those labelled madmen."

The "mad" were in rebellion against the "sane." And there was something strange here, something altogether historically new. For the "mad" made sense. It was the "sane" who no longer made any sense at all. At least not those "sane" people who called themselves psychiatrists.