

## Canadian News

# The CIA affair: a bad trip revisited

By Julianne Labreche

The scene was long ago and far away, in Zurich back in 1957, when Dr. D. Ewen Cameron, described by one colleague as "the godfather of Canadian psychiatry," rose to present his startling and severe new treatment for schizophrenia. Some members of his distinguished audience at the Second International Congress for Psychiatry, which included the grand old man of the profession, Dr. Carl Jung, seemed surprised by Cameron's harsh "de-patterning" techniques, but he was not rattled. Cameron frankly described his method as "a sharp tool."

The real razor's edge of Cameron's research only became public last week with the release of a chilling new book, by American author John Marks, *The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate."* It links Cameron, who was director of McGill University's Allan Memorial Institute from its founding in 1943 until his abrupt departure in 1964, with a 20-year, \$25-million effort by the



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### Author Marks: on the trail of the CIA

American Central Intelligence Agency to learn how to control the human mind. Between 1953 and 1973 the agency undertook a full-scale attempt to discover and develop techniques of mind control and brainwashing, fearing that the Soviets and Chinese had already perfected the methodology.

The project was hidden behind a succession of code names—first BLUEBIRD, then ARTICHOKE and later MK-DELTA—and then a "study group" called the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology for the Investigation of Human Ecology was established as a scientific front through which the CIA could subsidize research by recognized authorities who had no idea of the ulterior purposes of their new sponsor. The society was involved with 50 or 60 different universities in 21 countries. The little-known but fearsome drug LSD was em-

ployed in mind-influencing experiments involving, in some cases, unsuspecting prisoners, prostitutes and other "undesirables" on the fringes of U.S. society.

At McGill, the only Canadian university to become involved, the aggressive and pioneering Dr. Cameron conducted his experiments. The human ecology society, as Marks reveals in his book, sponsored the program at Allan Memorial from 1957 to 1964, advancing relatively modest amounts of \$4,000 and upward a year—never more than \$20,000. The centre's growing fame drew depressed and schizophrenic patients from all over the world, but of the 53 known to have undergone the treatment many were Canadians. *Maclean's* has talked to two of these. Val Orlikow, wife of federal NDP MP David Orlikow, describes her experiences as "the coldest, most impersonal treatment that anybody could give to anybody." (See box.)

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The other woman, also a member of a politically prominent family but who insists on remaining anonymous, tells of a desperate attempt to flee from further strenuous treatments.

Whether Cameron's patients were guinea pigs for the CIA or were simply subjected to their own doctor's determined and adventuresome experiments aimed at producing a quick cure for mental illness can never be known for sure, because Dr. Cameron was killed in a mountaineering accident in 1967. But Cameron's sometimes bizarre and unorthodox methods would understandably appeal to the CIA as offering a possible technique for brainwashing and then re-programming enemy agents. The "de-patterning" of undesirable behavior in Cameron's usually severely disturbed patients routinely started with "sleep therapy," in which they were heavily drugged and knocked out for as long as 65 days, though being disturbed two or three times daily by heavy electroshock treatments. Cameron hoped they would wipe out the patient's memory of unpleasant experiences and uncontrolled fantasies. He would then try to re-pattern the troubled brain by using what he called "psychic driving"—a procedure about as upsetting as it sounds. The patients, once again heavily sedated, were tucked away in a "sleep room" where taped messages were repeated again and again into their ears from speakers under their pillows.

Cameron also became a great believer in subjecting patients to repeated LSD "trips," as they are now familiarly known—but the impact of such nightmarish experiences can scarcely be imagined at a time when the drug was barely known to the public. He also gave his patients curare, famed as the South American arrow poison but now also known as an anesthetic. He built a box

Cameron: guinea pigs for the CIA



in a stable behind his laboratory where deprived completely of all sensory stimuli, with nothing to see or hear or smell or feel. One unfortunate woman remained in the box for 35 days, allowed out only for meals and toilet breaks.

One Canadian woman is identified in Marks's book only as "Lauren G"—which is not her real name—"a refined, glamorous horse woman" who looks like Elizabeth Taylor and was, in fact, screen-tested for the Taylor role in the 1944 movie *National Velvet*. After confirming the screen test, she told *Macleans* about Dr. Cameron's treatments. She still remembers having been put to sleep for six weeks, then waking and wanting to escape. Making a desperate dash outdoors in her dressing gown, she did not get far before she was dragged back and heavily sedated again. "I sure get the chills when I think about it," she recalls. "My own personal recollections are so gross, so horrible." Dr. Cameron's theory was that if a state of "complete amnesia" were produced in a patient—the mental slate wiped clean—the subject would eventually recall only her earlier normal behavior. But Lauren G says that while it took her 19 years to recall all of her life after her illness, she could remember the bad things too. She says she reverted to her old self only after ending her first marriage. Later she remarried, this time to the son of a former Tory cabinet minister.

The fact that Dr. Cameron was the first professor of psychiatry ever appointed at McGill, already one of the outstanding medical schools on the continent, puts in perspective the state the science had achieved by the mid-war years. Swamped by demands for help from a society under greater and greater pressures, the few early psychiatrists were forced to realize that the long and painstaking methods of treatment through psychoanalysis, as developed by Sigmund Freud and Jung in Europe, had become inadequate. Everywhere the search was on for new and swifter methods of restoring mental balance. Ewen Cameron was one of the pioneers in his field.

Just why he left McGill in 1964, no one now will say but colleagues seem agreed his departure was "abrupt." And, in a move rare in the field of medicine, Cameron's successor, Dr. Robert Cleghorn, called for a critical investigation of Cameron's treatments and found them to be no more effective than other, less tortuous methods. Whether the CIA felt it got its money's worth from the studies it financed in brainwashing at McGill is another unknown. But certainly the agency has been trying hard to wipe its own slate clean in recent years.

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## 'This stuff is killing me'

Not since Margaret Trudeau's candid confessions about her psychiatric treatment in 1974 has one woman's mental suffering attracted such widespread attention. The stress of the publicity shows on the face of Val Orlikow, wife of federal NDP MP David Orlikow, as she struggles through tears to talk. Even though purposely deciding about a year ago to co-operate with American author John Marks in exposing

an empty room, heavily drugged and listening only to repeated tape-recorded conversations between herself and Cameron. Finally, over the doctor's protests, she had the treatment stopped after she had fallen into such black depression that she told Cameron: "This stuff is killing me. I can't go on."

In retrospect, Val Orlikow is outraged and frustrated for having never been told LSD was a controversial drug. "I never benefited from any of the treatment I got at the Allan Memorial Institute," she maintains. Throughout many years of recovery, her husband has supported and even encour-



McGill University's CIA-backed research, she never anticipated the media blitz last week detailing her controversial psychiatric treatment. "I really don't like being portrayed as a freak by every radio station across the country," she says. "For them, it's a quick story—but for me it's my life."

Even though Val Orlikow all but went underground after the first reports appeared, she agreed to talk with *Maclean's* because she hopes she and other patients treated in the late 1950s and early '60s by the late Dr. Ewen Cameron will be justly compensated. Her frightening memories go back to 1956-57 when the Winnipeg woman, suffering from neurosis and postpartum depression, checked into McGill's Allan Memorial Institute. Within two weeks she unknowingly began to receive heavy doses of the then still novel drug LSD, which continued for two months—14 treatments in all. She recalls terrifying nightmares of feeling like a caged squirrel running around in endless circles and feeling herself shrink like Alice in Wonderland while agonizing how she would get down off her bed. She also was given Cameron's "psychic

### Val Orlikow: like a caged squirrel

aged her to speak out publicly. "This illness is no different from any other kind of illness," David Orlikow insists. Even today, however, Val Orlikow still suffers from what she believes to be the aftereffects of the treatment at McGill—an inability to concentrate when reading and writing, and a fear of crowds that began at the hospital.

In coming months, she intends to seek out other patients of Cameron's who also suffered his severe treatments and to encourage them to exert pressure on the CIA for financial compensation, as the Orlikows have already done. One CIA spokesman in Washington explains: "We are in touch with the attorneys for Mrs. Orlikow and her case is under consideration. We understand there may be a number of Canadians who feel that they were subjected to experiments which were financed by this agency." Not that a cheque would solve all Val Orlikow's losses. As she laments, "No one can give you back years of your life and the time you lost with your daughter and husband."