



# Which Way WPA ?

The WPA must take sides over apartheid in South Africa. With over 60 member countries, the WPA is a truly international organisation yet it has allowed one of its members, South Africa, to violate almost every internationally accepted principle of mental health care. The WPA also has the support of the World Health Organisation (WHO) yet it says nothing as South Africa continues to make a mockery of the WHO's most basic objective: 'health for all'. This is how the American Psychiatric Association sees psychiatry in South Africa:

Our investigation convinces us that there is good reason for international concern about black psychiatric patients in South Africa. We found unacceptable medical practices that resulted in needless deaths of black South Africans. Medical and psychiatric care for blacks was grossly inferior to that for whites. We found that apartheid has a destructive impact on the families, social institutions, and the mental health of black South Africans. We believe that these findings substantiate allegations of social and political abuse of psychiatry in South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

These facts are not new. In 1977 the WHO published a detailed report<sup>2</sup> of the effects of apartheid on mental health and the racist provision of psychiatric care in South Africa. Two years after the American Psychiatric Association published its report of an official visit to South Africa — the report was a damning indictment of psychiatry in that country and confirmed in painstaking detail, down to how black patients are not provided with toilet paper, the findings of the earlier WHO report. And in the recent period there have been persistent press reports of the increasing use of South Africa's psychiatric services and psychiatrists to contain and moderate the effects of brutal torture (both solitary confinement and physical torture) of political detainees of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

South Africa's psychiatrists and their organisation, the Society of Psychiatrists of South Africa, are up to their necks in the muck of apartheid. They stay silent, cover up and defend outrageous violations of basic human rights, let alone any ethical code of practice.<sup>3</sup> They have no right to remain members of respected international psychiatric bodies like the WPA.

# South Africa Out Of International Psychiatry!

1. Report of the Committee to Visit South Africa. Official Actions of the American Psychiatric Association. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 136:11, November 1979.
2. *Apartheid and Mental Health Care*. Report by the World Health Organisation, April 1977. United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, Notes and Documents No 11/77.
3. The record of South African psychiatry is examined in detail in: *'If we gave them shoes . . . they would kick their fellow patients': The case for South Africa's expulsion from international psychiatry*. Anti-Apartheid Movement, 13 Mandela Street, London NW1.