

Cameron

Blowing their cover

Canadian victims take the CIA to court

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ON TUESDAY morning in Washington, eight Canadians will take the Central Intelligence Agency to court. Whether they win their suit or not, in the act itself they should find a kind of vindication.

All of them are ex-inmates of Montreal's Allan Memorial Institute; all are ex-patients of its founder and former director, Dr. Ewen Cameron. In the late fifties and early sixties he subjected more than 50 patients to various forms of experimental psychiatric treatments.

Some were injected with LSD or sodium amylal and forced to listen to endless loops of taped voices exhorting them to improve their behavior.

Others were put into a chemical sleep for weeks or months at a time, treated to massive electroshock therapy until they were "depatterned" and incontinent, knowing neither where they were nor who they were; and they were forced to listen to the voices, playing from speakers on the wall or under their pillows, demanding that they get better.

Most believed they had brought this on themselves through their mental illness. They blamed themselves for their own pain and the pain they caused their families. Dr. Cameron was, after all, trying to help them. Who would believe otherwise? He was at the pinnacle of the psychiatric profession; they were mental patients.

Some could not exactly remember what happened to them, anyway — just that there was a before and an after in their lives, with their stay at the Allan marking the dividing line.

Then in 1977, a decade after Dr.

Cameron died of a heart attack while climbing a mountain in the Adirondacks, the news broke that in the years the plaintiffs had been in his care he had received funds from the CIA in its covert investigations of brainwashing and mind control. A cold-war intelligence fantasy had been realized to devastating effect in their lives, and Dr. Cameron, whether he was aware of the source of funds or not, had visited it upon them.

Decades of private pain were transformed; at last they were able to blame some force outside themselves for their suffering.

But to get the case to trial exacted its own price. Val Orlikow, the wife of New Democratic MP David Orlikow, was the first plaintiff:

when her husband approached Washington civil liberties lawyer Joseph Rauh to take the case in 1979, Mr. Rauh was sure he could win an out-of-court settlement. The CIA had been contrite when the details of the mind-control program (called MKULTRA) came out, and the director, Admiral Stansfield Turner, had promised to make reparations to unwitting victims.

But Ronald Reagan was elected President in 1980, and the CIA ceased to be contrite.

In fact, the suit became a litmus test of the agency's reborn influence and power as Mr. Rauh, his young associate, Jim Turner, and his generally elderly and frail plaintiffs struggled to win a stone-walling war of attrition. One of the original nine plaintiffs, Flo Langleben, has died,

and Mr. Rauh, now in his 70s, retired in 1987 because of ill-health. But not before he developed an overpowering distaste for "quiet diplomacy" Canadian-style.

