OTHER NEWS

SSI ENERGY CHECK RIPOFFS

In January, every recipient of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) was mailed a special check to cover extra energy costs this winter. The checks averaged $150-$200 each, and there was no requirement that the money must be spent for energy purposes. (The exact amount of the checks depended on the state in which the SSI recipients lived.) For many, especially those trapped in boarding homes, these extra checks could have represented a "new lease on life"--for example, when combined with their regular monthly SSI check, the "energy" check could have provided many residents with the extra amount needed to put down a rent and security deposit on their own apartment.

However, as we expected, boarding home operators have been ever vigilant, greedy, and criminal--they have deceived and coerced residents into signing over their checks. In New Jersey, the state ombudsman's office has collected dozens of accounts of such activity, according to The Inquirer. (One old man who refused to sign over his check had a letter opener held to his neck and was ordered to "sign it or else"; he signed.) We may be sure that the same pattern of abuse is occurring in every state.

If you are an SSI recipient and have not received an energy check, or if you had your check taken from you, contact a lawyer immediately. In New Jersey, call the Ombudsman toll-free at 1-800-792-8932. In the Phila. area call ALMP or our attorneys (567-2828). People in other states may contact the Alliance as well for information on where to locate a concerned lawyer. We urge all victims of these criminal ripoffs to fight the pig profiteer boarding home landlords until the foul stench of their exploitation of powerle$s people no longer pollutes the face of this planet.

U.S. URGED TO PROSECUTE SMITHKLINE

On January 24 the Public Citizen Health Research Group, affiliated with consumer activist Ralph Nader, urged the federal government to prosecute the SmithKline Corporation for deliberately withholding information on the dangers of Selacryn, a recently banned SmithKline product prescribed for high blood pressure. The group says that SmithKline unnecessarily delayed reporting to the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) information on over 50 cases of kidney and liver damage following Selacryn use, including 5 deaths; and that although SmithKline knew of the rapidly rising number of reports on these destructive drug effects in early November, Selacryn was advertised in medical journal ads in January. Selacryn was finally banned by the FDA on January 15. Sidney Wolfe, director of the Health Research Group, has asked the FDA to press the Justice Department to file the maximum possible criminal charges against SmithKline. The maximum penalty for delaying reports of unexpected drug reactions with intent to defraud is 3 years in prison, a $10,000 fine, or both.

"Of course we are disappointed by the developments concerning Selacryn, but we are extremely pleased by the excellent overall performance of SmithKline in 1979," said SK's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Robert F. Dee on Jan. 21. "It was a year of exceptional growth..." SmithKline claimed record sales of 1.3 billion dollars in 1979. (However, U.S. sales of Contac Cold Capsules fell--is it possible that our boycott had a role in this development?)

Charges concerning Selacryn reaffirm what we have been trying to expose all along--that SmithKline is more interested in profits than in people's lives, and that Dee & Co. will deliberately conceal deadly drug effects in order to make a buck. Tagamet, SK's "wonder drug" for ulcers which has nearly doubled sales in the past two years, has been linked in some studies to reduced sperm counts and possible stomach cancer. However, since there is no "proof" yet, production and sale of the drug continue without even a moratorium for reevaluation of its effects. And, as we know, the deadly effects of Thorazine have been known since the fifties, but the drug remains on the market. The question remaining for psychiatric inmates is what it must take for the FDA to ban Thorazine and other phenothiazines, which can and do cause irreversible brain damage and a host of other horrible physical effects. If you would like to write to the Health Research Group about this, their address is 2000 P Street, N.W., Suite #708, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Friends of the Alliance, an "auxilliary" group of ALMP supporters, is currently working along with ALMP members to expand and better publicize the boycott of SmithKline over-the-counter products--Contac, Love Cosmetics, Sine-Off, Sea & Ski products, and Allergy Relief Medicine (A.R.M.). Inmates, ex-inmates and non-inmates alike are urged to join this effort, which will include letter-writing, leafletting, picketing, etc. Call us for more details on how to help.