

Mar. 26/73

A RECOMMENDATION ON MPA RESEARCH

I want to suggest that we seriously consider abolishing the two research positions for a period of time and replacing them with two "service" positions, such as crisis hostel coordinators. This is not to say that the research jobs are unimportant. In fact, they are as important as any other MPA job, but the fact is that almost nothing is being done in the area of research.

As month after month drifts by, the group has come to see the research as essentially having almost no function. There are no research meetings, no library meetings or library; politics night happens very occasionally and with no coherent program; the amount of written publications (pamphlets, articles, books etc.) could have been produced in a 2-3 week period. No political leadership or initiative is being shown.

All of this is bad for a number of reasons. First, it confirms people's cynicism about research and politics as being useless intellectual activities, and reinforces hopelessness about social change. Second, because the positions are filled, others are blocked from taking the initiative to set up a real research program. And third, if no one will initiate such a program, the salaries could be used to provide services that really do help people.

Since September, MPA has spent more than \$3,800 in research salaries. These are a few things the research committee has undertaken to do, but which have not been done: complete the revised Act; produce a flow-chart of the Act; hold educationals to inform members about legislative issues; meet with Bob Hunter in early January to do a series of Sun columns on our research findings; meet with the Deputy Minister of Mental Health and officials from the Attorney-General's office in late January; build a useful library; hold regular library meetings; hold regular research meetings; organize regular programs for politics night etc etc etc.

These things are only a reflection of the lack of initiative being taken in the research-political area. You only have to read the paper for a few nights to get some idea of the things the research committee could be doing. To take one example--and there are dozens of others--on March 30th a workshop is being held at Riverview on the "homocidal mental patient." The research committee could make a real impact at the workshop if they prepared a handout showing the number of mental patients in B.C. (about 10,000 a year), the number of murders (I guess about 25-50) and the number of mental patients committing murder (I guess between 1 and 4). The leaflet could point out that less than .05% of mental patients are homocidal, and go on to show how these sorts of workshops (advertised in the Sun as a workshop on "killer patients") reinforce oppressive myths about people in hospital.

MPA could bring about a strong coalition of community groups in Kits to ensure that the government mental health team would be run democratically. To do so however, we should be writing articles etc to hand out at meetings showing that we know the field of "mental health," and that we can provide leadership in bringing the government program under community control.

We need a comprehensive file of facts and a lengthy, detailed article describing the entire mental health system in B.C. and documenting how repressive it is. The research committee should be resource people with these facts at their fingertips so they could easily show members where to find information. By now, however, everyone knows this information can't be found at MPA. I'm talking about answers to questions like the following, taken at random: What is the daily psychiatric bed cost at VGH? How is the B.C. Government mental health budget divided up? What are cost-sharing arrangements between the provincial and federal govts? What is the unemployment rate among ex-patients? What is the class background of patients in various kinds of "treatment"? What is the suicide rate among patients in B.C.? What are the relative costs of other forms of treatment such as day hospital, night hospital, home treatment? How much cheaper are MPA's services than hospitalization. These are the sorts of questions that were asked in an MPA research committee leaflet in Nov. 1971. In the intervening year and a half, most of them are still not answered. The facts however are available, largely in libraries. If we are going to have a real research program, the research coordinators should begin by spending almost full-time in libraries for 1-2 months.

A primary way for MPA to establish its credibility as a real political force is to produce clear, well-documented articles with tables, charts, graphs etc. The more real information we provide, the less we will have to rely on rhetoric and the more likely we'll be to create political change. The research jobs require hard work. I suggest that unless this work is being done, it would be better all around to spend this part of the budget on services.

The main point I want to make is that the research people should not wait for other people to get them off their asses (as is happening again in this hand-out); they should be taking the initiative to stimulate others to get interested

in research, politics and in changing the goddamn system.

This proposal for abolishing the research positions doesn't come out of the blue. Over the past 6 months, we have held a number of "emergency" meetings to work out ways of starting a program. Despite all the statements of good intentions, virtually nothing concrete has been accomplished.

I think it is time to re-think the whole area and to begin using those salaries for positions which will be of actual benefit to members. I feel it is time to give the research people a definite ultimatum and deadline.

Therefore, I want to recommend that the business meeting take the following motion to the March 28/73 general meeting:

- (a) Unless the research committee has produced concrete, substantial written and other work by the general meeting of May 9, 1973, the two research positions be temporarily abolished and replaced by others (perhaps crisis hostel workers); and
- (b) If the research positions are abolished, a committee be struck to seek out research applicants who will provide leadership in the area of research and politics, and that the research positions not be re-established until such persons are found.

- Lanny Beckman