

Mental Health Act changes



by Stan Persky

Kits Mental Health

Any reasonably sane person who's followed the more-than-six-month scuffle between the Kitsilano Citizens Committee on Mental Health and the B.C. Government's bureaucratic cast of thousands would have to conclude that the government is trying to drive the citizens crazy.

On Tuesday, Nov. 20, Kits citizens will be in Victoria, meeting with Clay Perry (executive assistant to Health Minister Dennis Cocke), in a last-ditch effort to find out if the government is the least bit sincere about the concept of "local citizen involvement" in mental health, and to try and overturn the govern-

ment's original budget structure calling for an all-professional team operating in a sterile office environment, the Kits citizens came up with an alternative.

The citizens suggested that the Mental Health Centre be located in a comfortable old house, run a 24-hour drop-in service, more or less equalize the salaries of the workers on the team to minimize top-down administration, provide more money for clients' needs, hire people on the basis of their ability to work with other people rather than on "professional qualifications", and establish a much needed crisis centre.

The citizens' alternative was itself a compromise. Though a majority of the more-than-50-member citizens group believed in even more radical propositions, they are sensitive to the tensions of the situation; they had to present a budget that would be reasonable enough for the medical bureaucrats of the Metro Board of Health to approve and also reasonable enough to maintain their credibility in the 35,000 person neighbourhood as "reasonable" people. So, for instance, the citizens avoided confronting psychiatric economics: at one meeting, psychiatrist Parfitt (who had announced his intention to apply for one of the jobs) on being asked why he should be paid \$21,000 for half-time work, frankly replied that he thought the price was right and furthermore, he "couldn't ask his family to make the sacrifice" of living on less. The citizens decided to lay off that particular issue.

SENSITIVE CITIZENS

The budget prepared by the Kits group was duly shipped off to the whole maze of local administrators: the Mental Health Project Coordinating Committee; Dr. John Kyle, Director of the Greater Van Project; the Metro Health Board; the Mental Health Advisory Committee, etc. (A major spin-off of the citizen's initial

participation, besides having to acquire an enormous amount of knowledge about the ins-and-outs of civic government, was opening up a second front of struggle to acquire more citizen power within these higher administrative levels. At first, all of this seemed promising, exciting and relevant. As time passed, and the bureaucrats established sub-committees to investigate the issue of citizen participation and asked the citizens to submit briefs on why citizens should participate, the fun wore off and people began to feel that what they were doing was ironically becoming further and further removed from their original goal of securing humane help for people in trouble.)

participation, besides having to acquire an enormous amount of knowledge about the ins-and-outs of civic government, was opening up a second front of struggle to acquire more citizen power within these higher administrative levels. At first, all of this seemed promising, exciting and relevant. As time passed, and the bureaucrats established sub-committees to investigate the issue of citizen participation and asked the citizens to submit briefs on why citizens should participate, the fun wore off and people began to feel that what they were doing was ironically becoming further and further removed from their original goal of securing humane help for people in trouble.)

participation, besides having to acquire an enormous amount of knowledge about the ins-and-outs of civic government, was opening up a second front of struggle to acquire more citizen power within these higher administrative levels. At first, all of this seemed promising, exciting and relevant. As time passed, and the bureaucrats established sub-committees to investigate the issue of citizen participation and asked the citizens to submit briefs on why citizens should participate, the fun wore off and people began to feel that what they were doing was ironically becoming further and further removed from their original goal of securing humane help for people in trouble.)

NASTY RUMOURS

The bureaucrats took a look at the Kits-prepared budget, gulped once, and bounced it right back to the citizens as unacceptable. The friendly governmental rhetoric of the early days gradually disappeared. Nasty rumours about "those radicals in Kits", "rabble-rousers", and "unrepresentativeness" began to float around. The citizens, however, didn't take to their heels. Deciding it was important to be "reasonable", they dug in and began a round of bargaining negotiations.

After a series of compromises in which (as Kits Steering Committee member Barry Coull puts it) "three para-professional workers, a crisis hostel and various monies to be used for clients were lobotomized into non-existence", the budget began gaining approval. In August, the Metro Board of Health, not wildly enthusiastic, gave their okay to the Kits budget and sent it off to Dr. Tucker's Community Care Services Society (the Victoria bureau that administers community mental health) for what was supposed to be rubber-stamp approval.

UNIQUE

The process had been long and arduous. It had also been frustrating. Yet, even with the compromises, there was something to show for all the work. The Kits

Continued to page 23





by Stan Persky

Kits Mental Health

Any reasonably sane person who's followed the more-than-six-month scuffle between the Kitsilano Citizens Committee on Mental Health and the B.C. Government's bureaucratic cast of thousands would have to conclude that the government is trying to drive the citizens crazy.

On Tuesday, Nov. 20, Kits citizens will be in Victoria, meeting with Clay Perry (executive assistant to Health Minister Dennis Cocke), in a last-ditch effort to find out if the government is the least bit sincere about the concept of "local citizen involvement" in mental health, and to try and overturn the government's Oct. 20 rejection of the citizen's plan for what neighbourhood mental health services ought to look like in Kits.

The story of how a well-intentioned scheme to improve mental health care in B.C. has reached a deadlock in one Vancouver community is, of course, complicated, but because it raises many of the issues embedded in the question of "community control" of social services, understanding the struggle of the Kits citizens provides a vital key to similar "community politics" battles in process throughout the province.

SELLING A PLAN

More than a year ago, Health Minister Cocke bought a scheme from Dr. John Cumming of the Vancouver Metropolitan Board of Health. The idea behind the Cumming plan to establish *neighbourhood mental health centres* was to have *professional mental health teams* help ("treat") emotionally disturbed ("mentally disordered") people right in their own community rather than shipping them out ("committing" them) to large looneybins ("mental hospitals") like Riverview.

Cumming outlined his scheme in a widely-circulated paper called "A Plan for Vancouver". The plan, though experimental, was moderate. A team of two half-time psychiatrists (at \$21,000 a year each), a \$19,000 administrator, two secretaries, a senior social worker, an occupational therapist, and a half-dozen or so psychiatric nurses would set themselves up in a

Though a majority of the more-than-50-member citizens group believed in even more radical propositions, they are sensitive to the tensions of the situation; they had to present a budget that would be reasonable enough for the medical bureaucrats of the Metro Board of Health to approve and also reasonable enough to maintain their credibility in the 35,000 person neighbourhood as "reasonable" people. So, for instance, the citizens avoided confronting psychiatric economics: at one meeting, psychiatrist Parfitt (who had announced his intention to apply for one of the jobs) on being asked why he should be paid \$21,000 for half-time work, frankly replied that he thought the price was right and furthermore, he "couldn't ask his family to make the sacrifice" of living on less. The citizens decided to lay off that particular issue.

The budget prepared by the Kits group was duly shipped off to the whole maze of local administrators:

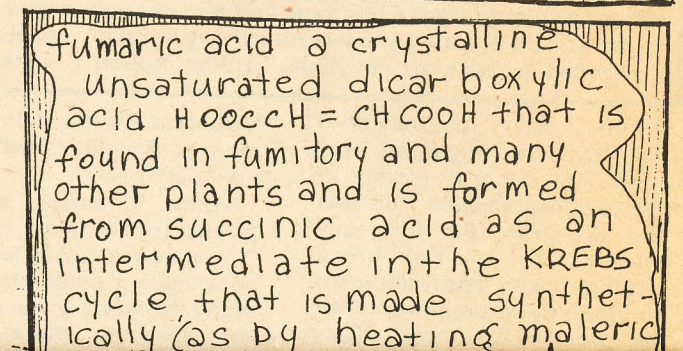
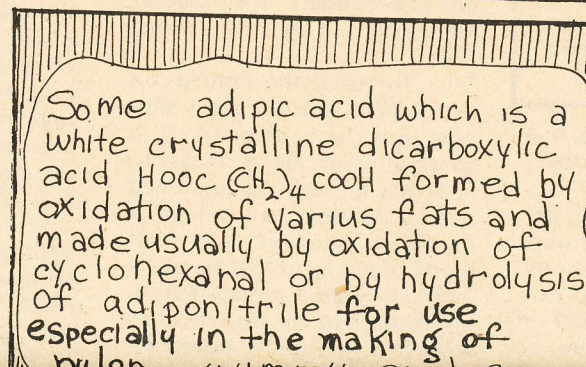
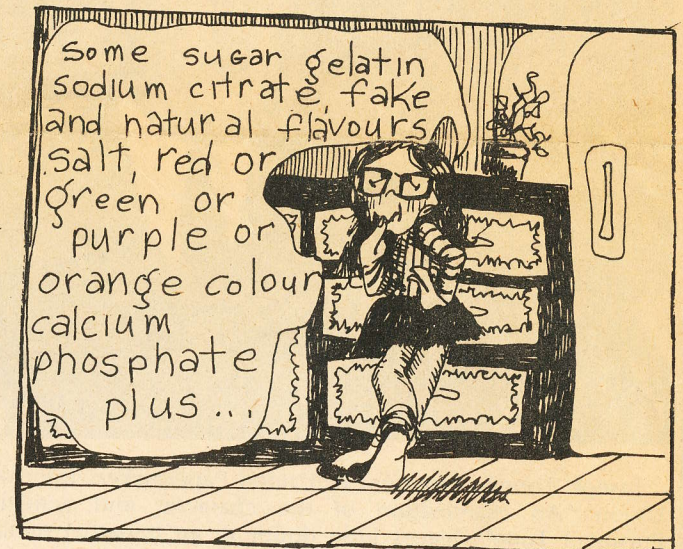
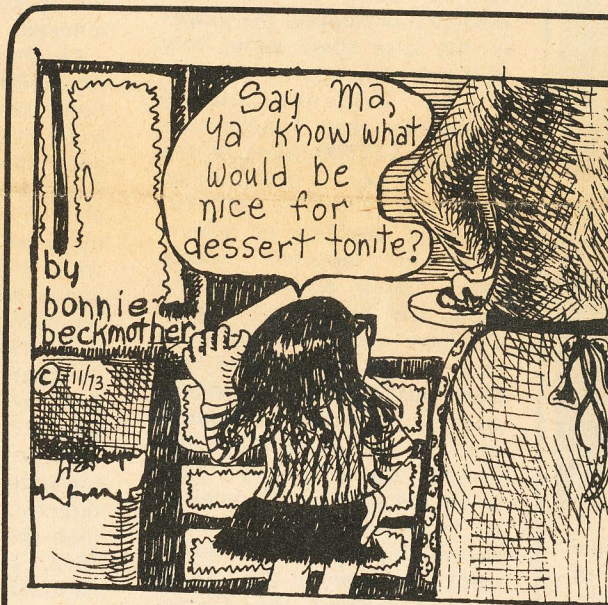
the Mental Health Project Coordinating Committee; Dr. John Kyle, Director of the Greater Van Project; the Metro Health Board; the Mental Health Advisory Committee, etc. (A major spin-off of the citizen's initial

rumours about "those radicals in Kits", "rabble-rousers", and "unrepresentativeness" began to float around. The citizens, however, didn't take to their heels. Deciding it was important to be "reasonable", they dug in and began a round of bargaining negotiations.

After a series of compromises in which (as Kits Steering Committee member Barry Coull puts it) "three para-professional workers, a crisis hostel and various monies to be used for clients were lobotomized into non-existence", the budget began gaining approval. In August, the Metro Board of Health, not wildly enthusiastic, gave their okay to the Kits budget and sent it off to Dr. Tucker's Community Care Services Society (the Victoria bureau that administers community mental health) for what was supposed to be rubber-stamp approval.

UNIQUE

The process had been long and arduous. It had also been frustrating. Yet, even with the compromises, there was something to show for all the work. The Kits
Continued to page 23



mental health, and to try and overturn the government's Oct. 20 rejection of the citizen's plan for what neighbourhood mental health services ought to look like in Kits.

The story of how a well-intentioned scheme to improve mental health care in B.C. has reached a deadlock in one Vancouver community is, of course, complicated, but because it raises many of the issues embedded in the question of "community control" of social services, understanding the struggle of the Kits citizens provides a vital key to similar "community politics" battles in process throughout the province.

SELLING A PLAN

More than a year ago, Health Minister Cocke bought a scheme from Dr. John Cumming of the Vancouver Metropolitan Board of Health. The idea behind the Cumming plan to establish *neighbourhood mental health centres* was to have *professional mental health teams* help ("treat") emotionally disturbed ("mentally disordered") people right in their own community rather than shipping them out ("committing" them) to large looneybins ("mental hospitals") like Riverview.

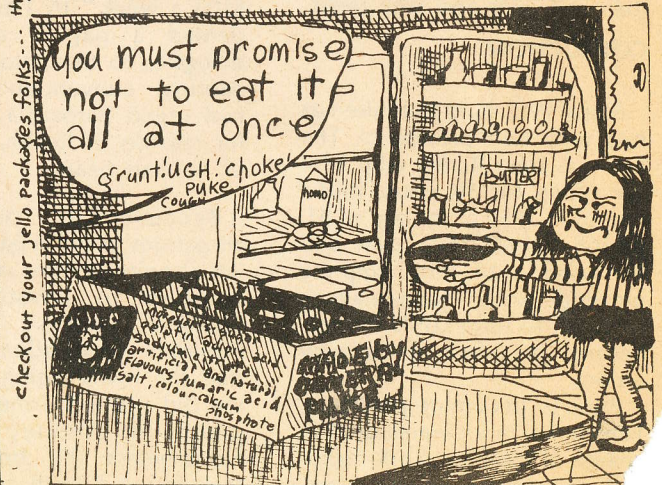
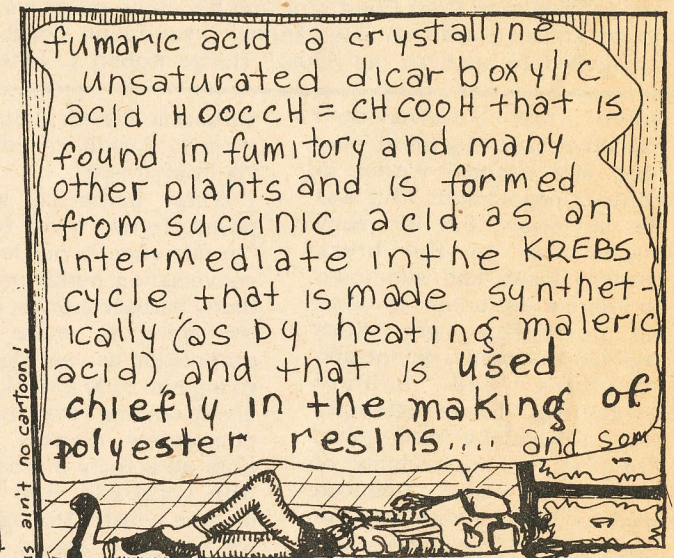
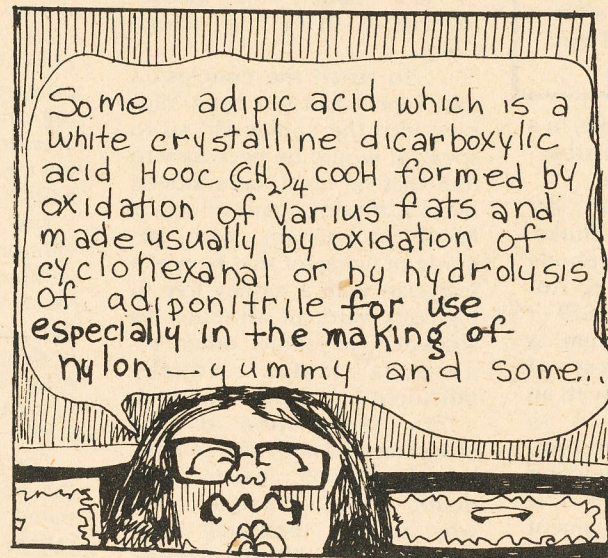
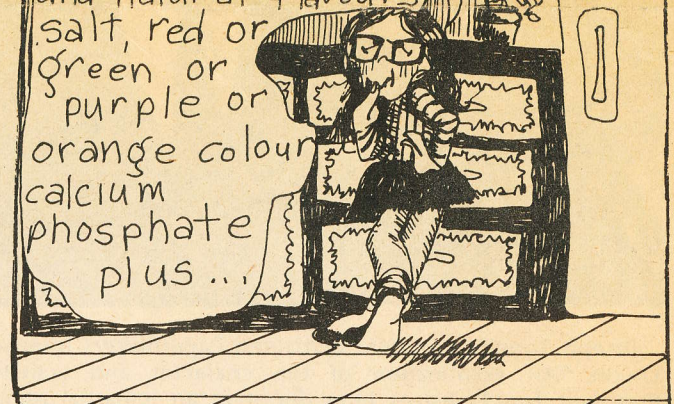
Cumming outlined his scheme in a widely-circulated paper called "A Plan for Vancouver". The plan, though experimental, was moderate. A team of two half-time psychiatrists (at \$21,000 a year each), a \$19,000 administrator, two secretaries, a senior social worker, an occupational therapist, and a half-dozen or so psychiatric nurses would set themselves up in a suite of offices and work with 150-180 people suffering mental problems. The plan called for more than a dozen of these centres scattered like lily-pads throughout the city.

Buried in Cumming's plan was one seemingly-simple sentence that's led to the Kits controversy: "There should be substantial local participation in planning the form of service which should emerge." Citizens in Kits decided to treat the call for citizen involvement at face value. Working with Dr. Hugh Parfitt, a liberal psychiatrist living in the area and hired by the newly-established Greater Van Mental Health Project to get community participation and the team going, a Citizens Committee was born in the Kits United Church basement one balmy evening in May, 1973.

TROUBLE

The citizens group quickly set forth a set of liberal "Guidelines" for how the team ought to do its job, secured veto power over who would be working on the team, and began proposing a budget for their local Mental Health Centre. That's when the trouble started.

On the face of it, creating a budget may look like dull and unrewarding business. The Kits citizens,



Citizens

FOLLOW THE RULES

2 Fellow steering committee member Barry Coull expressed similar dismay. "Kitsilano has been the most active, most democratic citizens group in Vancouver," he claims. "We've created a realistic budget. The bureaucrats in Victoria are either telling us that we've got to follow their rules or else they're saying that we don't know what Kitsilano needs and they do."

On Nov. 5, the Kits Citizens met and decided to stay with the situation. They found themselves with an unlikely ally, the Metro Board of Health, who apparently were also surprised by the Victoria rejection (which is also a rejection of the Board of Health's own power) and voted to re-submit the Kits budget as is. In addition to re-affirming their budget to the Metro Board of Health, the Kits group shot off a message to the Community Care Services Society in Victoria that again "reasonably" explained the issues, and arranged a meeting in Victoria between themselves and one of Health Minister Cocke's assistants.

Even if an agreement is ultimately achieved, the Kits group warily and wearily realizes that the "form of mental health service" issue in their area won't be over.

On the budget question, the government has finally driven the citizens to a point of enough's enough (to quote an old NDP slogan). "We're angry enough to state that we won't compromise substantially any further," says Coull. "Unless we're given satisfaction,

committee

Continued from

3 we'll turn our efforts to exposing the whole myth of citizen participation," he added, as he and several other Kits representatives hopped aboard the ferry at Tswassen and headed off to Victoria.

1 budget was unique. It was the first one by a representative citizens group. Other Vancouver neighbourhoods had been stuck with the original government plan. Also, the Kits budget spoke to local needs unmentioned in any other area. People in other neighbourhoods were beginning to get interested in the Kits organizing process.

Then came the big un-surprise. After two months of sitting in Victoria, on Oct. 20 the Kits budget was rejected again. There's no need to run down the point-by-point items of dispute. It's enough to say that in each place where the citizens wanted the "form of service" tailored to the neighbourhood, the government, after asking for expressions of community diversity, insisted that the services be uniform with that of other areas and uniformly easy to watchdog from the vantage point of centralized authority.

"You play our ball-game by our rules and you can play with us. That's definitely what's going on," says Christine Krawczyk, a member of the Kits Citizens Steering Committee.

"The facade is being taken off. They're not talking about effective citizen participation. Just some token citizen input. That's becoming more and more apparent," charges Krawczyk.

HEALTH

acquire an enormous ins-and-outs of civic a second front of power within these first, all of this seemed As time passed, and b-committees to in- participation and asked why citizens should people began to feel s ironically becoming their original goal of ole in trouble.)

at the Kits-prepared ed it right back to the friendly governmental lly disappeared. Nasty ls in Kits", "rabble- eness" began to float , didn't take to their t to be "reasonable", round of bargaining

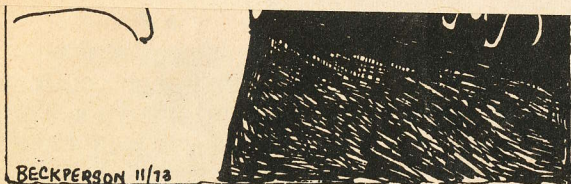
es in which (as Kits Barry Coull puts it) rs, a crisis hostel and d for clients were

lobotomized into non-existence", the budget began gaining approval. In August, the Metro Board of Health, not wildly enthusiastic, gave their okay to the Kits budget and sent it off to Dr. Tucker's Community Care Services Society (the Victoria bureau that administers community mental health) for what was supposed to be rubber-stamp approval.

UNIQUE

The process had been long and arduous. It had also been frustrating. Yet, even with the compromises, there was something to show for all the work. The Kits

Continued to page 23



by Stan Persky

Kits Mental Health

Any reasonably sane person who's followed the more-than-six-month scuffle between the Kitsilano Citizens Committee on Mental Health and the B.C. Government's bureaucratic cast of thousands would have to conclude that the government is trying to drive the citizens crazy.

On Tuesday, Nov. 20, Kits citizens will be in Victoria, meeting with Clay Perry (executive assistant to Health Minister Dennis Cocke), in a last-ditch effort to find out if the government is the least bit sincere about the concept of "local citizen involvement" in

had announced his intention to apply for one of the jobs) on being asked why he should be paid \$21,000 for half-time work, frankly replied that he thought the price was right and furthermore, he "couldn't ask his family to make the sacrifice" of living on less. The citizens decided to lay off that particular issue.

The budget prepared by the Kits group was duly shipped off to the whole maze of local administrators:

the Mental Health Project Coordinating Committee; Dr. John Kyle, Director of the Greater Van Project; the Metro Health Board; the Mental Health Advisory Committee, etc. (A major spin-off of the citizen's initial

