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CONVENTION AFTERTHOUGHTS

BOYCE R. WILLIAMS

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Williams was to have concluded the Pittsburgh Convention with a Summary, but time did not permit. Instead, he wrote his talk in the form of a letter, and President Blake mailed this letter to the membership after the convention had closed. The article that follows was taken from that letter.

AN EXCITING FIRST

Throughout my years in the Federal Office in Washington scarcely a month has passed but what we in the area of deafness have been involved in an experience in program development or similar activities for which there has been no precedent to guide us. We have in a sense become accustomed to pioneering, to the thrill of a successful first venture in hitherto untraveled channels. One might assume that we wear more than a thin veneer of sophistication. And we have thought so. However, the first Convention of Professional Rehabilitation Workers for the Adult Deaf shattered this shell. It was a stimulating, fascinating, challenging experience from beginning to end.

As I reflect upon this historic Convention, a number of factors repeatedly surface. The most persistent of these is the fact that 88 persons registered, probably more than half of them coming long distances just for this meeting. It is regrettable that all of those in the preceding workshop on placement were unable to stay over to share our deep sense of accomplishment and progress despite the fact that workshop participation was channeled to persons who would be expected to rally strongly to the PRWAD banner. Also, schedule conflicts of local people who had been expected to carry important roles took a bit of the glow out of this first flush of success. The lesson for us may be that at subsequent meetings we should be sure that the PRWAD meeting comes first. Should it be on a weekend so that

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more of our deeply interested members may be free to share the rich experience of a professional convention?

Notwithstanding these negative reactions, the number of participants, the excellent speeches, the stimulating discussion groups and the earnest attention to constitutional revisions all emphasize that PRWAD is a needed organization. It should bring to our work a climate of healthy growth, a cross-fertilization of concepts and roles between disciplines which have heretofore communicated only superficially. The benefits to the deaf person to whom we are all committed are of incalculable depth and breadth.

PERSONAL GROWTH

A phrase came up in one of the sessions that I find particularly attractive and meaningful—*personality adjustment*. While it could be an oversimplification, it is a fact that all of us in this exciting first venture went through gratifying experiences in personality adjustment and growth. Group dynamics are clearly effective media for this and from my own experiences clearly justify full involvement of all public and voluntary workers for the deaf in such a convention.

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Many individuals and groups at coffee breaks and out of meeting hours bent their thinking to the matter of developing and maintaining momentum for more members. Absence from the membership roster of persons who are deeply involved in our work and expected to provide leadership in important aspects of the PRWAD's mission is discouraging and disquieting. Why are they not involved? How have we failed to reach them? Did they receive invitations to join? Have they been asked why they do not belong? These are among the questions that were posed again and again.

Expansion of the membership committee to strengthen the drive was a recommendation of many. Assumption by individuals of responsibility for personal solicitation of colleagues who should be fully involved was also recommended frequently. Everyone get two!

JOURNAL OF REHABILITATION OF THE DEAF

Appreciation and admiration for the splendid high quality support provided by the University of Illinois throughout our organizational struggles was clearly observed. The excellence of the first two issues of our official publication, *Journal of Rehabilitation of the Deaf*, for which so much is owing to the teamwork of the University of Illinois, Second Vice-President Steve Quigley, and Editor Roger Falberg, was a frequent point of reference. Maintenance and further development of the high quality content, editorial standards and format were emphasized in a number of instances.

STATUS

Important guidelines for our development as an effective professional entity flowed from every speaker and discussion group. The need for PRWAD to avoid the pitfall of overconcern with status arose early. The strangulation that might very well stem from exclusiveness in membership and thus thwart fulfillment or even effective move toward our basic objectives highlighted formal and informal individual and group interchanges.

CERTIFICATION VS. MEMBERSHIP

The question of certification was explored for the first time. What should be the PRWAD role? We now have professional organizations for disciplines like psychology, social work, audiology, and speech and education certifying or otherwise qualifying people to function in certain levels and situations in their areas of competence. The question remains: Who will certify these people as competent to serve deaf persons?

A parallel question was whether certification *per se* is a desirable procedure. The alternative might be that membership standards for PRWAD should be such that the function of certification is fulfilled in the process of securing membership. We should recognize here that this last thought reactivates the question of exclusiveness or status about which we have been warned. Consideration of this factor brought out that classifications of membership are possible, that is basic membership signifying full competence to serve all deaf persons and associate membership which would be for the person who does not have such competence but is very interested and anxious. These are controversial matters which must be fully ventilated by appropriate committees over the next several years before finalization into any semi-fixed membership pattern. As one speaker brought out, we must also start channeling our thinking toward student memberships at reduced rates. These young people who are majoring in our field have already demonstrated through their study a commitment that augurs well for their future contributions to the roles that PRWAD will play.

LEGISLATION, PUBLIC EDUCATION

Another important role of the PRWAD is the matter of promoting legislation that authorizes public services or community functions that will improve and equalize opportunities for deaf people.

A vital function of PRWAD is the important and endless matter of public education about the group whom we serve—specifically, the deaf.

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

The question of dues was touched upon only lightly but it is clearly an important matter. We must move away from the biennial \$20.00 fee to an annual fee of \$10.00 so that individual decisions to join may be more easily reached. In the final analysis it is the responsibility of every worker for the deaf of any description or discipline to be interested in the success of the PRWAD for it fills the role of a generator that has long been missing, a clearinghouse that is urgently needed. The dues collecting process should be such that membership is almost automatic. Also, we must have in mind that there are many organizations competing for dues. We should do all that we can to reduce these problems for our members.

Much of the discussion in the group with which I worked brought out that we may be facing a change of name within the next few years as the impact of large scale public funding comes into focus in the states and localities. The reorganization in the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare which established the Social and Rehabilitation Service, bringing under one tent deaf people from the cradle to the grave, indicates that some place along the line we may need to drop our identification with adults only. There was also some interchange to the effect that, as social services for deaf people grow, there may be proportionately less of a role for rehabilitation *per se*. This could mean abandonment of the word "rehabilitation." These are at this time straws in the winds of change. We must think about them and talk with each other so that we may make intelligent decisions at the appropriate time.

Important to the health, stability and balance of the PRWAD was the concept which highlighted the need for refinement of our organizational structure so that our officers are a representative distribution of the disciplines comprising the PRWAD. This is an important matter for our law committee to have under consideration and discussion.